

CHRISTIAN
M O R A L S :

BY
HANNAH MORE.

In moral actions, Divine law helpeth exceedingly the law
of Reason to guide a man's life ; but in supernatural, it
alone guideth.

HOOKE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

L O N D O N :

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AS
A SLIGHT MEMORIAL
OF
SINCERE ESTEEM AND CORDIAL FRIENDSHIP,
THIS LITTLE SKETCH
OF
CHRISTIAN MORALS
IS,
WITH STRICT PROPRIETY,
INSCRIBED TO
THE REV. THOMAS GISBORNE,
OF YOXALL LODGE;
IN HIS WRITINGS AND IN HIS LIFE,
A CONSISTENT
CHRISTIAN MORALIST.

P R E F A C E.

MR. POPE, in his Essay on Criticism, has asserted, that the “last and greatest art” of literary composition, is “the art to blot.” With a full conviction of the difficulty and the duty of this art, the author of the following pages ventures to insist, even in contradiction to this high authority, that there is, in writing, an art still more rare, still more slowly learned, still more reluctantly adopted — *the art to stop.*

But when shall this difficult, but valuable, art be resorted to? At what precise moment shall we begin to reduce so wholesome a theory to practice? It may be answered — at the period when time may reasonably be suspected to have extinguished the small particle of fire which the fond

conceit of the author might tempt him to fancy he once possessed.

But how is he to ascertain this critical moment of extinction? His own eyes, always dim in the discernment of his own faults, may have become quite blind. His friends are too timid, or too tender, to hazard the perilous intimation. If his enemies, always kindly ready to perform this neglected office of friendship, proclaim the unwelcome truth, they are probably not believed. The public, then, who are neither governed by the misleadings of affection, nor influenced by the hostility of hatred, would seem to be the proper arbiters, the court from whose decision there should lie no appeal.

But if, through generous partiality to good intentions, or habitual kindness to long acquaintance, that public, instead of checking, continue to cherish, the efforts which they have been accustomed to indulge, and the author be tempted still to persist in writing, may he not be in imminent danger
of

of wearing out the good humour of his protectors, by a successive reproduction of himself — of abusing their kindness, by the vapid exhibition of an exhausted intellect?

May the writer of the following pages, without incurring too heavily the imputation of vanity, be permitted to observe, that there is a sense in which the favour she has uniformly experienced, is honourable to that public who have conferred it? Their indulgence has never been purchased by flattery; their support has never been a payment for softening errors that require, not to be qualified, but combated; has never been a reward for incense offered to the passions, for sentiments accommodated to whatever appeared to be defective in any reigning opinion, in any prevailing practice. They have received with approbation unvarnished truth, and even borne with patience bold remonstrance. In return, she is willing to hope, that she has paid them a more substantial respect, by this hazardous sincerity, than if she had

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endeavoured to conciliate their regard by indirect arts and unworthy adulation.

Next to injuring any reader, her deepest regret would be to offend him; but when the questions agitated are of momentous concern, would not disguising truth, or palliating error, be, as to the intention, the worst of injuries, however powerless the writer might be in making a bad intention effectively mischievous? Sincere, therefore, as would be her concern, if any stroke of her pen

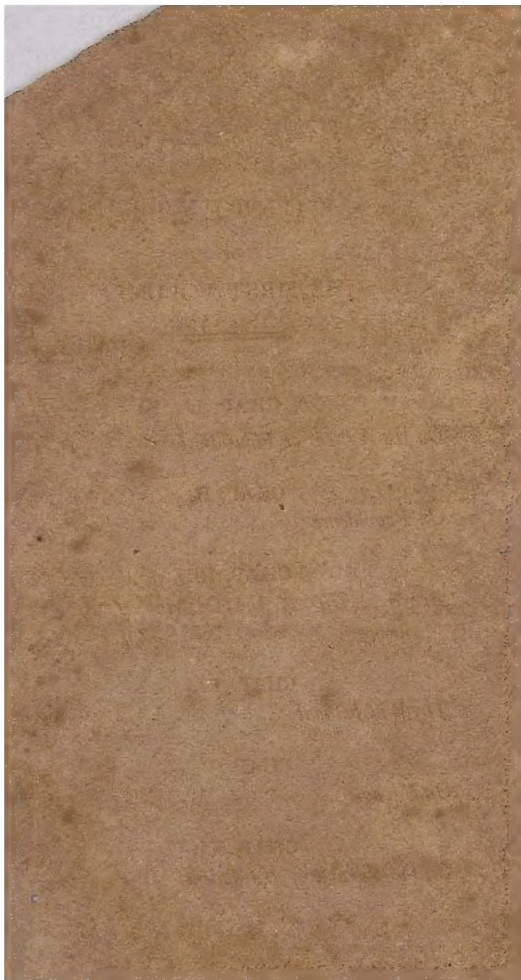
Should tend to make one worthy man her foe, yet the feeling of having contributed to mislead a single youthful mind, by the suppression of a right, or the establishment of a false principle, would be more painful than any censures which an imprudent honesty might draw down upon her.

If the humble work now presented to the world, be of little use to the reader, the writer is willing to hope it may not be altogether unprofitable to herself. If it induce

her more strenuously to cultivate the habit of rendering speculation practical, if it should dispose her to adopt more cordially what she is so prompt to recommend, she will then have turned to some little account the hours of pain and suffering under which it has been composed.

She does not, however, absurdly presume to plead pain and suffering as an apology for defects in a work which she was at liberty not to have undertaken; for, with whatever other evils sickness may be chargeable, it imposes on no one the necessity of adding one more to the countless catalogue of indifferent books.

Barley Wood,
December 10th, 1812.



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CHRISTIAN

CHRISTIAN MORALS.

CHAP. I.

On the Writers of Pious Books.

ALL the things in this world carry in them such evident marks of imperfection, are so liable to be infected with error, good is separated from evil by such slight partitions, and the deflection from what is right is so easy, that even undertakings which should seem most exempt from danger are yet insecure in their conduct, and uncertain in their issue. Writing a soundly-religious book might seem to put in the claim of an exempt case; but does experience prove that the exemption is infallible? The employment is good, the motive is likely to be pure; the work may be unexceptionable in its tendency, and useful in its consequences. But is it always beneficial to the

writer in the proportion in which he intends it to be profitable to the reader? Even of the reader, is his own improvement always the leading aim? Does a critical spirit never diminish the benefit which the book was calculated to convey? If he is convinced by the more essential truths it imparts, is not some trivial disagreement of opinion, in a matter on which persons may differ without any charge against the piety of either, made to defeat all the ends of improvement? Is not an insignificant, perhaps an ill-founded objection, suffered to invalidate the merit of the whole work? Is not this eagerly-detected fault triumphantly kept in the fore-ground, while all that is valuable is overlooked and its efficacy defeated; the criticism being at once intended to give prominence to the error of the writer and the sagacity of the critic? Another reader is probably searching for brilliancy when he should be looking for truth, or he is only seeking a confirmation of his own opinions
when

when he should rather have been looking for their correction.

As to the writer, is he not in danger of being absorbed in the mechanical part of his work, till religious composition dwindles into a mere secular operation? May he not be diverted from his main object by an over-attention to elegance, to correctness, to ornament, —all which indeed are necessary; for if he would benefit he must be read, if he would be read he must please, if he would please he must endeavour to excel; —but may he not in taking some, take too much pains to please, and so become less solicitous to benefit, to the injury both of his reader and himself? May not the very lopping and pruning his work, the flowers which he is anxiously sticking into it, the little decorations with which he is setting off those parts which he fears may be thought dry and dull, raise a sensation in his mind not unlike that which a vain beauty feels in tricking out her person? May he not, by too much confidence in his own powers, be blind to

errors obvious to all but himself; or else may he not use the file too assiduously, and by over-labour in smoothing the asperities of his style, diminish the force of his meaning, and polish honest vigour into unprofitable elegance?

Some indeed have been so indulgent to authors under their many difficulties, as to allow them a certain mixture of inferior excitement, as an under-help to assist such motives as are more pure. If they did not feel a little too full of their work, when it was under their hand, it has been said, they would not devote to it the full force of their mind. This anxiety, or rather this absorption, it is presumed, lasts no longer than till the immediate object is accomplished. It retreats indeed, but waits for the author, seizes him again with undiminished force on his next undertaking. If he fancied that his former subject was all in all while his mind was intent upon it, that preference, like the fondness of an animal for its young, which is lost when they

no longer need its fostering care, is transferred to the next.

As this ardour in a rightly-turned mind will not be sufficiently durable to ripen into vanity, but will cool as soon as the end for which it was exerted is answered; it will not materially injure the conscientious writer; for he will probably, when the impetus is taken off, as much undervalue his work, as he had before over-rated it. But woefully deficient in humility is that author, whose enthusiasm does not subside, when it is no longer necessary to keep alive the spirit of his undertaking! Convicted indeed will he be of vanity, who persists in thinking his work as glowing, as when, with a judgment dazzled by his ardour, he viewed it hot, and fresh-drawn from the furnace!

But perhaps when a man engages in any little service, if he did not in some degree exaggerate its value, in his hope of its utility, he would want one motive for attempting it. Is it not therefore a smaller evil

that he should a little magnify its importance to his imagination, than that complete hopelessness should totally defer him from all enterprize? Natural indolence is in many too powerful a subduer even of religious exertion, to allow them to work without hope. If hope flatters, she at least supports; thus something is achieved which else would not have been done at all. Again, the timid writer foresees that many objections may be raised to his work. This would amount to a disqualifying dejection, did he not take comfort in the chance that his censors may possibly disagree among themselves as to the points deserving criticism, and that one may even commend what another condemns. Thus his mind is kept in a just equilibrium; without the expectation of censure, he would be vain; without some hope of approbation, even the purity of his intention might not always secure him from despondency.

But though no mixed motives or human feelings in the author ought to interfere

fere with those of the reader, who has only to do with the book, and not with the man, it is of no small moment to himself, that both feelings and motives be pure. It is of the last importance that he do not impose on himself the belief, that he has only the honour of religion at heart, when literary renown, or victory over an adversary, may be the predominating principle. He will also be careful that his best endowments be not converted into implements of injury; he will be cautious that his learning, which is so useful to arm his zeal, do not help to encumber it; that his prudence, which is so necessary to moderate, do not extinguish it.

But if he come off clear from these temptations, other and greater lurk behind. He should bear in mind, that in composing a religious work for the public, he is producing the best part of himself; that he is probably exhibiting himself to others as much better than he is; for whatever be the faults of his own character, it is his bounden duty to conduct his reader to the highest approach

to excellence. Independent of his general defects, he is at least carefully keeping out of sight every vain thought which may have stolen upon him while writing, every evil temper which may have assailed him, every temptation to indulge too ardent a wish that his book may procure praise for himself, as well as benefit to his readers. To flatter himself inordinately on this head, as well as in overanticipating the great effects it will produce, is not, perhaps, the smallest of his dangers. That very self-knowledge which he has perhaps been inculcating on others, would preserve him from an undue estimation both of himself and his book.

It was the sneer of a witty, but discouraging Satyrist, that, "To mend the world's a vast design." It is, indeed, a design from which the purity of his motive may not always secure the humility of the author. Yet modestly to aim at a meliorating that little portion of it which lies within his immediate sphere, is a duty out of which he should not be laughed by wits and epigrammatists.

Instead

Instead of indulging unfounded hopes of improbable effects, the Christian writer will be humbled at the mortifying reflection, what great and extensive evil the most insignificant bad man may effect, while so little comparative good can be accomplished by the best. But it is to be regretted, that even religion is no sure protection against the intrusion of vanity, that it does not always secure its possessor from over-rating his own agency, from fondly calculating on the unknown benefits which, by his projected work, he is preparing for mankind. A pious Welch minister, many years ago, being about to publish a sermon, previously consulted the writer of these pages how many thousand copies he ought to print. He felt not a little shocked at her advising him to reduce his thousands to hundreds; scores she did not dare advise. As she had foreseen, not half a dozen were sold, except a few, charitably taken off his hands by his friends. At her return soon after, from the metropolis, he hastened to her with all the ardour of impatience, and seriously inquired,

B 5 whether

whether she had observed any material reformation at the court end of the town, since the publication of his discourse.

Among the many unsuspected but salutary checks to the vanity of a pious writer, it will not be the least, that his very popularity may make the intrinsic value of his work questionable ; — that he may be indebted for its favourable reception, not to its excellencies, but its defects, not to the deep, but to the superficial views he has taken of religion ; that it may be more acceptable only because it is less searching ; that if he has pleased, it may be owing to his having been more cautious than faithful. If there is reason to suspect that his success arises from his having skimmed the surface of truth, when he ought to have penetrated its depths, that he has reconciled the reader to Christianity and himself by a disingenuous discretion, by trimming between God and the world, by concealing truths he ought to have brought forward, or by palliating those he durst not disavow : popularity thus obtained, will afford

ford ground of humiliation rather than of triumph. In avoiding these, and all similar errors, he will also not fail to bear in mind, that He who gave the talents, gave also the right bent to the use of them, and that, therefore, he has no more ground for boasting of the application than of the possession.

When he is called upon by the nature of his subject to expatiate strongly on this vice, or to point out the danger of that error, Does he never feel a sort of conscious superiority to certain individuals of his acquaintance, who may be infected with either, and, for a moment, be tempted to sit rather in the seat of the scorner, than in that of the counsellor? On such occasions, there is nothing which he will more carefully watch, than the temper of his own mind. When duty compels him to be severe against any false opinion, or wrong practice, he will be cautious not to mix with his just censure, any feeling of disdain, any sentiment of indignation, against any individual whom he may bear in mind; nor will he indulge the unworthy wonder how

such or such a person will be mortified at the exposure of a fault to which he is addicted. Nor will he harbour in his bosom an uncharitable vehemence against those whom the reproof may suit, nor a secret self-complacent certainty, that if *any thing* can do them good, this must do it; that though they hear not Moses and the Prophets, they cannot but listen to his pointed admonitions — that they can never stand out against such persuasions as he has to offer — never resist such arguments as he has prepared for their conviction.

But what is still a more serious danger, Has he never been tempted to overlook his own faults while he has been exposing those of others; and this, though the failing he is condemning, may be peculiarly his own? With just indignation against the offence he is reproofing, Has he never once forgotten to mingle tender compassion for the offender, remembering, that he himself is sinful dust and ashes; that he also stands in need of infinite mercy, and has been only rescued
by

by that mercy from being on a level with the worst objects of his just disapprobation?

It would, notwithstanding, be the highest degree of unfairness, to prefer a charge of injustice, hypocrisy, or even inconsistency, against an author, because his life, in some respects, falls short of the strictness of his writings. It is a disparity almost inseparable from this state of frail mortality. He may have fallen into errors, and yet deserve to have no heavier charge brought against him than he has brought against others. Infirmary of temper, inequality of mind, a heart, though fearing to offend God, yet not sufficiently dead to the world; — these are the lingering effects of sin imperfectly subdued, in a heart which yet longs, prays, and labours for a complete deliverance from all its corruptions.

When a pious writer treats on any awful topic, he writes under a solemn conviction of its vast importance; he trembles at the idea of not being entirely faithful, of not being valiant for the truth, of not being
honestly

honestly explicit, of not declaring the whole counsel of God. His own heart is deeply impressed with the dignity of his subject, and he deprecates the thought of shrinking from the boldest avowal of every truth, or of withholding the most powerful inforcement to the practice of every virtue. He is apprehensive lest, on the one hand, when he assails vice or error, he should appear to indulge a violent or vindictive spirit, and be magisterially lifting his fallible self into the chair of authority; lest his attack on the vice might be construed into uncharitableness to the man. On the other hand, he is fearful lest by being more forbearing he should be less upright; lest if he tried to soften he should deceive; lest, by indulging too much a spirit of conciliation, he should compromise truth for human favour. — Honest though imperfect, sincere though fallible, he endeavours to bring his principles, his faith, and his convictions, into full operation; he warmly declares what he cordially

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feels, and faithfully testifies, what he firmly believes.

But when he comes to act, he is sometimes brought to be too keenly sensible of the very fault in himself, against which he has been cautioning others; deeply does he lament that he feels strong remains in himself of that corruption against which it was not the less his duty to direct his attacks. Some temptation presses him, some infirmity cleaves to him. These unsubdued frailties prove that he is a man, but they do not prove that he is a hypocrite. The truth is, the religious writer is sometimes thought worse than other men, because his book was considered as a pledge that he should be better. It was expected that the faults he described he would avoid; the passions he had blamed he would suppress; the tempers he had exposed he would have subdued. Perhaps it will commonly be found that the reader had expected too much and the writer done too little.

The

The writer on religious topics is however the person who of all others ought to watch himself most narrowly. He has given a public pledge of his principles. He has held out a rule, to which, as others will be looking with a critical eye to discover how far his conduct falls short of it, so he should himself constantly bear in mind the elevation of his own standard; and he will be more circumspect from the persuasion, that not only his own character but that of religion itself will suffer by his departure from it. The consciousness of the inferiority of his practice to his principles, if those principles are truly scriptural, will furnish him with new motives to humility. The solemn dread lest this inconsistency should be produced against him at the last day, is a fresh incentive to higher exertions, stirs him up to augmented vigilance, quickens him to more intense prayer. He experiences at once the contradictory feeling of dreading to appear better than he really is, by the high tone of piety
in

in his compositions, or of making others worse by lowering that tone in order to bring his professions nearer to the level of his life. Perhaps the most humiliating moment he can ever experience is, when by an accidental glance at some former work he is reminded how little he himself has profited by the very arguments with which he may have successfully combated some error of the reader; when he feels how much his own heart is still under the dominion of that wrong temper of which he has forcibly exposed the turpitude to the conviction of others.

There is, however, no personal reason which could ever justify his holding out an inferior standard. If there is any point in which he eminently excels, he has the best of all possible reasons for pressing it upon others — his own experience of its excellence. If there be any in which he unhappily fails, he is clearly justified in recommending it from the humbling sense of his own deficiency in it. Thus he will in either
case

case inforce truth with equal energy, from causes diametrically opposite. Is it not then obvious that as there is no vanity in insisting on a virtue because the writer possesses it, so there is no hypocrisy in recommending a quality because he himself is destitute of it?

But if, through the so frequently alledged imperfection attached to humanity, Christian writers do not always attain to the excellence they suggest, let us not therefore infer that their principles are defective, their aims low, or their practical attainments mean. Let us not suspect that it is not the endeavour of their life, as much as the desire of their heart, to maintain a conduct which shall not discredit their profession. Above all, let us be cautious of concluding that they do not believe what they teach, because they have passions like other men; provided we observe them struggling with those passions, and making a progress in their conquest over them, though that progress be impeded by natural infirmity, though it be obstructed by occasional irritation. The triumphant
detector

detector of the discordance between the author and his book knows not the secret regrets, hears not the fervent prayers, witnesses not the penitential sorrows, which a deep sense of this disagreement produces in the self-abasing heart. To instance in a familiar case:—In the heat of conversation with the author, he has probably marked an impatient word, a hasty expression, a rash judgment; these he treasures up, and produces against him; but he does not hear, in his nightly review of the errors of that day, his self-rebuke for this unsubdued impetuosity, his resolution against it, the earnest prayer, which perhaps at this moment is carrying forward the gradual subjugation of his temper.

Yet his reputation might suffer in another way; for if the critic could see these humbling confessions of the writers in question, he would be ready to conclude that they were “Sinners above all the Galileans.” Whereas the truth most probably is, that they are so alive to the perception of the evil of their
own

own hearts, that things which would be slight faults in the estimation of the accuser, to them appear great offences. Things which they lament as evils of magnitude, would to the less tender conscience be impalpable, imperceptible. For instance, — While the caviller would call even the omission of prayer a venial fault; *they* would call a heartless prayer a sin; where the one would think all was well if the literal performance had not been neglected, the other would be uneasy under the exterior observance, if they felt that the spirit had not accompanied the form. The reprover might even accuse the serious Christian of absurdity, should he have overheard him humbling himself for something which was obviously a virtue. He was not, however, so preposterously humble, as to make the virtue the ground of his regret — he was abasing himself for some vanity, which like an excrescence had grown out of it, some inattention which like a poison had mixed with it. When a humble man meditates on his vices, and an
irreligious

irreligious man on his virtues, the vices of the one might be sometimes deemed about as unsubstantial as the virtues of the other actually are.

The writer of good books, in common with other authors, is exposed to one danger from which other men are more exempt, that of being so immediately the object of his own attention. This may lead him to be too full of himself. His intellect is even more constantly before his eyes than the form and face of the beauty are before hers. But if in this exercise he may be tempted to think too well of his understanding, the mischief will be counteracted by the advantage which such a close view may bring to his heart. The faults he reprehends in general, will bring his own faults more forcibly before him, and it will be a humbling consideration which he will not fail to press home on himself, to reflect, that he is better able to penetrate into the recesses of the erring hearts of others, from the sympathies of his own.

Repeated

Repeated and successful pains have been taken by some popular wits *, in whom levity has answered the end of malice, to lower the value of pious instruction, by exposing the discrepancy between the exhortation and the exhorter. They have ingeniously invented cases and situations in which the clergyman is preaching powerfully and efficaciously on the duty of submission to the divine will ; immediately after which, they contrive to betray him into a paroxysm of overwhelming impatience at some great domestic calamity of his own. This, as it tends to make the infirmity of sincere Christians a matter of triumph, could only have been done with a view to make them ridiculous ; a laugh is cheaply though not very honourably raised, and the insignificance or hollowness of religious instruction perhaps indelibly stamped on the mind of the young reader. But supposing the circumstances to have been real, Ought the frail affections, ought the conscious infirmity of these good

* Goldsmith, Fielding, &c. &c.

men to have led them to withhold from their audiences the necessity of Christian resignation? Such instances of natural feeling in certain stages of a progressive piety, neither prove religion to be powerless, nor its professor deceitful. Was the fervent, but fallible apostle, who, in a moment of infirmity, denied his master, a hypocrite, when he said, "though all the world should be offended, yet will not I?"

Yet is this captious spirit an additional reason why the pious writer should guard against excesses in feeling, which if the reader could witness, he would exultingly reiterate the cheap but melancholy truism — *How much easier it is to preach than to practise!* How gladly would he have brought the conduct to confront the counsel, and have missed all the benefit of the discourse, by the disclosure of the failing!

But allowing the worst — granting that the writer is not in all points exemplary; if we resolve never to read a work of instruction because the author had faults, Lord
Bacon's

Bacon's inexhaustible mine of intellectual wealth might have still lain unexplored. Luther, the man to whom the Protestant world owes more than to any other uninspired being, might remain unread, because he is said to have wanted the meekness of Melancthon. Even the divine instructions conveyed in the book of Ecclesiastes would have been written in vain.

It is not necessary that the writer under consideration should, like the sacred penmen, criminate himself. Their ingenuous self-abasement added weight to the truth of their general testimony, and was doubtless directed by the holy spirit, as well for this purpose, as for the humiliation of the offending historian. But above all it is calculated to shew that the renovation of hearts so imperfect was the work of the spirit of God.

Though the pious writer in these days is not called upon to exercise this self-disparaging egotism, yet let not his silence on this head be attributed to a desire that he may be
thought

thought a better man than Moses, who heroically perpetuated the memory of that offence which was an inhibition to his entering the land of promise — nor than David the recorder of his own sins, the enormity of which could only be exceeded by the intensity of his repentance — nor than Saint Paul, who published himself to have been a blasphemer and a persecutor. — If the best men among us have, through the preventing grace of God been preserved from the signal offences of Prophets and Apostles, they will themselves be the foremost to acknowledge how, beyond all comparison, they are below them, in that devotedness of spirit, that contempt of earthly things, and that annihilation of self, which so eminently characterized those inspired Servants of God.

But suppose we were to go farther — even if it could be proved that some individual charge had *not* been altogether unfounded. Even this possible evil in the man, would not invalidate the truths he has been teaching. Balaam though a bad man pro-

phesied truly. Erasmus, whose piety is almost as doubtful, as his wit and learning were unquestionable, yet by throwing both into the right scale, was a valuable instrument in effecting the great work in which he was concerned. Erasmus powerfully assisted the reformation, though it is not quite so clear that the reformation essentially benefited Erasmus.

If then the writer advances unanswerable arguments in the cause of truth, if he impressively enforces its practical importance, his character, even if defective, should not invalidate his reasoning. Though we allow that even to the reader it is far more satisfactory when the life illustrates the writing, yet we must never bring the conduct of the man as any infallible test of the truth of his doctrine. Allow this, and the reverse of the proposition will be pleaded against us. Take the opposite case. Do we ever produce certain moral qualities which Hobbes, Bayle, Hume, and other sober sceptics possessed, as arguments for adopting their opinions?

nions? Do we infer as a necessary consequence, that their sentiments are sound because their lives were not flagitious.

But though it is an awful possibility, that the same work may at once promote God's glory and prove a danger to the instrument that promotes it — that the opulence of the very mind which is advancing religion, may be used by the owner to his hurt — that he may be so absorbed in it as a business, that he may lose sight of his end — that he may neglect personal, while he is advancing public religion — or be so anxious for the success of his work, that he cannot commit the event to heaven: let us thankfully profit by the truths he teaches; bless God that he has been useful to us; and pray that his errors may not be imputed to him.

Many a sincere Christian will confess that when he is writing in an animated strain in the cause of religion, there are moments in which, from imbecility of mind or infirmity of body, or failure of animal spirits, while he is promoting the spiritual interests

of others, he is inwardly lamenting his own deadness to the very things on which he is insisting. He however perseveres; like the army of Gideon, "faint yet pursuing," he suffers not the feeling to obstruct the act, till, as a reward for his perseverance, the act brings back the feeling. Were it suspected that some of his most approved pages were written under this declension of zeal, what a clamour would be raised against his inconsistency, when his merit — if we dare use the word merit — consists in overcoming the languor of his spirit, and in acting as if he felt it not. His depression may in fact have been augmented by his humility. He has trembled lest the solemnity with which he has been calling upon others, should not stir up his own feelings; lest the arguments which were intended to alarm the reader, should leave his own heart cold and unaffected.

While it is of the nature of scientific principles to adapt themselves only to one particular bent of mind, and of the inventive powers

powers to address persons of imagination only: it is the character of Christianity, and should be the aim of the Christian writer, to accommodate its instructions to every class of society, to every degree of intellect, to every quality of mind, to every cast of temper. Christianity does not interfere with any particular form of study, any political propensity, any professional engagement, any legitimate pursuit. It claims to incorporate itself with the ideas of every intelligent mind which lies open to receive it; it infuses itself, when not repelled, into the character of every individual, as it originally assimilated itself to that of every Government, without sacrificing any thing of its specific quality, without requiring any mind of a peculiar make for its reception.

Without altering its properties by any infusions of his own, a judicious writer will always consider how he may render it most acceptable to the capacity of the general recipient. To exclude reason from religion, he knows is not the way to attract

argumentative men to enquire into its truth ; — to exclude elegance from its exhibition, is not the probable method to invite men of taste to speculate on its beauty. If however the writer possess little of the graces which embellish truth, if he cannot adorn it with those charms which, though they add nothing to its lustre, yet attract to its contemplation ; still plain sense and unaffected piety may contribute to the production of a work which may prove useful to a large and valuable proportion of readers. But here if genius is not essential, good taste is never to be dispensed with. A sound judgment will be requisite to prevent piety from being repulsive to readers who have been accustomed to view other intellectual subjects exhibited in all the proprieties of which they are severally susceptible. Let them not see a subject of this transcendent importance, injured by any debasing mixture, disfigured by any coarseness of language, nor degraded by any vulgar associations.

On

On the other hand, while some object so strenuously against the introduction of the affections into religion, what are we to understand from it, but that in the opinion of the objectors, a man will write the better because he does not feel his subject,—that he will teach religion more safely to others, from not having felt its influence on his own heart,—that he will make a deeper impression by writing from books than from himself, or rather that making an impression at all is a dangerous thing,—that it is of the nature of enthusiasm, proceeding from it, and productive of it;—that therefore it is better that the reader should not be impressed, but only informed.

But the sound and sober Christian takes the best precaution against infusing a fanatical spirit by not possessing it. He cannot communicate the distemper of which he is not sick. He cautiously avoids it on a double ground. He knows that enthusiasm and superstition are not only mischievous in their nature, but that they furnish the

profane with a plausible argument against religion itself. He remembers, and applies the observation, that to some Pagan Poets, especially Lucretius, these errors supplied Atheism with her most powerful arms. But though he allows that enthusiasm is dangerous, he continues to write like one who knows that it is not the exclusive danger of the age, like one who is convinced that phrenzy is not the only distemper in our spiritual bills of mortality; like one whose heart is warmed, not by animal pulsation, but by those quickening oracles of truth which carry in them "the demonstration of the spirit and of power;" like one who feels that religion is not a misleading fire, but an animating principle which at once enlarges his views, elevates his aims, and ennobles his character.

But to return to the reader. — If we had no higher reason to aim at improvement in piety, one would almost think that the mere feelings of gratitude and good-nature might tempt us to shew our affection to
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our pious benefactors, by profiting from their exhortations, their councils, their persuasions. It might almost touch a heart dead to superior considerations, to reflect how many departed worthies have wasted their strength, as to us, in vain. Among the witnesses who will appear against us in the great day of account, *they* will stand the foremost. Let us tremble as we figure to ourselves our unwilling accusers in that band of holy men, who earnestly sought to draw us, not to themselves, but to those treasures of inspiration, of which they were the faithful expositors; to the Prophets and Apostles, — “to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to God the judge of all.”

And is it not a cruel return to refuse those who still meekly wait the effect of their labours upon earth, the honest gratification of seeing that we have derived some little advantage from their exertions? Let us shew them that they have not offered up the fervent prayers which doubtless accompanied their unwearied labours to no

end. While so many saints are now rejoicing in heaven, in the society of those whom their holy labours were made instrumental in bringing thither; let us not give those who are still zealously devoting their talents to the same glorious purpose upon earth, sad cause to lament the total inefficacy of their endeavours—to regret that they are sent to them who will not hear, or who remain as if they had not heard—to suspect that if we do give them a patient hearing, it is for the sake of their style, their rhetoric, their good taste; but that when their eloquence opposes our corruptions, when their arguments cross our inclinations, when their persuasions intrench upon our passions, or their remonstrances interfere with our vanity, we are insensible to the voice of the charmer; or if we forgive their piety for the sake of their talents, we seldom go further than forgiveness.

CHAP. II.

On Providence.

IT is not easy to conceive a more deplorable state of mind, than to live in a disbelief of God's providential government of the world. To be threatened with troubles, and to see no power which can avert them; to be surrounded with sorrows, and discern no hand which can redress them; to labour under oppression or calumny, and believe there is no friend to relieve, and no judge to vindicate us; to live in a world, of which we believe its ruler has abdicated the throne, or delegated the direction to chance; to suspect that he has made over the triumph to injustice, and the victory to impiety; to suppose that we are abandoned to the casualties of nature, and the domination of wickedness; to behold the earth a scene of disorder, with no superintendant to regulate it; to hear

the storms beating, and see the tempests spreading desolation around, with no influence to direct, and no wisdom to controul them: all this would render human life a burden intolerable to human feeling. Even a heathen, in one of those glimpses of illumination which they seemed occasionally to catch, could say, *it would not be worth while to live in a world which was not governed by Providence.*

But, as soon as we clearly discern the mind which appoints, and the hand which governs, all events, we begin to see our way through them: as soon as we are brought to recognize God's authority, and to confide in his goodness, we can say to our unruly hearts, what he said to the tempestuous waves, *Peace, be still.* Though all is perplexity, we know who can reduce confusion into order: once assured of the protection of the Supreme Intelligence, we shall possess our souls in patience, and resign our will with submission. As soon as this conviction is fully established, we become persuaded that
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a being of infinite love would never have placed us in a scene beset with so many trials, and exposed to so many dangers, had he not intended them as necessary materials by which, under his guidance, we are to work out our future happiness; — as so many warnings not to set up our rest here; — as so many incentives to draw us on in pursuit of that better state to which eternal mercy is conducting us through this thorny way.

To keep God habitually in view, as the end of all our aims, and the disposer of all events — to see him in all our comforts, to admire the benignity with which he imparts them — to adore the same substantial, though less obvious mercy, in our afflictions — to acknowledge at once the unwillingness with which he dispenses our trials, and the necessity of our suffering them — to view him in his bounties of creation, with a love which makes every creature pleasant — to regard him in his providential direction with a confidence which makes every hardship supportable — to observe the subserviency of events

to

to his eternal purposes : all this solves difficulties otherwise insuperable, vindicates the divine conduct, composes the intractable passions, settles the wavering faith, and quickens the too reluctant gratitude.

The fabled charioteer, who usurped his father's empire for a day, is not more illustrative of *their* presumption, who, virtually snatching the reins of government from God, would involve the earth in confusion and ruin, than the denial which the ambitious supplicant received to his mad request, is applicable to the goodness of God in refusing to delegate his power to his creatures : *My son, the very tenderness I shew in denying so ruinous a petition, is the surest proof that I am indeed thy father.*

Sounds to which we are accustomed, we fancy have a definite sense. But we often fancy it unjustly ; for familiarity alone cannot give meaning to what is in itself unintelligible. Thus many words, without any determinate and precise meaning, pass current in common discourse. Some talk of those
chimerical

chimerical beings, nature, fate, chance, and necessity, as positively as if they had a real existence, and of Almighty power and direction as if they had none.

In speaking of ordinary events as fortuitous, or as natural, we dispossess Providence of one half of his dominion. We assign to him the credit of great and avowedly supernatural operations, because we know not how else to dispose of them. For instance:—We ascribe to him power and wisdom in the creation of the world, while we talk as if we thought the keeping it in order might be effected by an inferior agency. We sometimes speak as if we assigned the government of the world to two distinct beings: whatever is awful only, and out of the common course, we ascribe to God, as revolutions, volcanoes, earthquakes. We think the dial of Ahaz going backward, the sun stationary on Gibeon, marvels worthy of Omnipotence; but when we stop here, is it not virtually saying, that to maintain invariable order, unbroken regularity, perpetual uniformity, and systematic

systematic beauty in the heavens and the earth, does not exhibit equally striking proofs of infinite superintendence ?

Many seem to ascribe to chance the common circumstances of life, as if they thought it would be an affront to the Almighty to refer them to him ; as if it were unbecoming his dignity to order the affairs of beings whom he thought it no derogation of that dignity to create. It looks as if, while we were obliged to him for making us, we would not wish to encumber him with the care of us. But the gracious Father of the universal family thinks it no dishonour to watch over the concerns, to supply the wants, and dispose the lot of creatures who owe their existence to his power, and their redemption to his mercy. He did not create his rational subjects in order to neglect them, or to turn them over to another, a capricious, an imaginary power.

We do not, it is true, so much arraign his general providence, as his particular appointments. We will allow the world to be nominally

minally his, if he will allow us our opinion in respect to his management of certain parts of it. Now, that he should not put forth the same specific energy individually to direct as to create, is supposing an anomaly in the character of the all perfect God. Whatever was his design in the formation of the world and its inhabitants, the same reason would, beyond a doubt, influence him in their superintendence and preservation. David, in describing the simple grandeur of omnipotent benignity, sets us a beautiful pattern. He does not represent the belief of God's providential care as an effort, but describes our continual sustenance as the necessary unlaboured effect of infinite power and goodness. *He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness*; thus making our blessings rather, as it were, a result, than an operation.

And as we are not under the divided controul of a greater and a subordinate power, so neither are we, as the Persian mythology teaches, the subjects of two equal beings, each of whom distributes respectively
good

good and evil according to his peculiar character and province. Nor are we the sport of the conflicting atoms of one school, nor of the fatal necessity of another. There is one omnipotent, omniscient, perfect, supreme Intelligence, who disposes of every person and of every thing according to the counsel of his own infinitely holy will. "The help that is done upon earth, God doth it himself." The comprehensive mind, enlightened by Christian faith, discovers the same harmony and design in the course of human events, as the philosopher perceives in the movements of the material system.

Without a thorough conviction of this most consolatory doctrine, what can we make of the events which are now passing before our eyes? What can we say to the perplexed state of an almost desolated world? There is no way of disentangling the confusion but by seeing God in every thing. — Not to adore his Providence as having some grand scheme which he is carrying on, some remote beneficial end in view, some unrevealed design to accomplish, by means not
only

only inscrutable but seemingly contradictory, is practical atheism. To contemplate the events which distract the civilized world, the tyranny which tears up order and morality by the roots; to behold the calamities of some, the crimes of others—such blackness gathering over the heads of some countries, such tempests bursting over those of others—these scenes must subvert the faith, must extinguish the hope, of all who do not firmly believe that the same power which “stilleth the raging of the sea and the noise of the waves,” can in his own good time also still *the madness of the people*; will in his appointed season enable us to say, “And where is the fury of the oppressor?” He may, and we know not how soon, enable us to ask, “Where is the man that made the earth to tremble—that did shake kingdoms—that made the world as a wilderness—that destroyed the cities thereof—that opened not the house of his prisoners?” Yes—disorganized as the state of the world appears to be, let us be assured that it is not turned adrift, that things are not left to go
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on at random. Though the people are rebellious, the Sovereign has not renounced his dominion over them. The most oppressive and destructive agents are his mysterious ministers; they are carrying on, though unconsciously, his universal plan — a plan, which though complicated is consistent; though apparently disorderly will be found finally harmonious.

In some pieces of mechanism we have observed different artists employed in different branches of the same machinery: in this division of labour, each man performs his allotted portion, in utter ignorance perhaps, not only of the portions assigned to the others, but also of the ultimate application of his own. Busy in executing his single pin, or spring, or wheel, it is no part of his concern to understand the work assigned to others, still less to comprehend the scheme of the master. But though the workman is ignorant how the whole is to be arranged, the machine would have been incomplete without his seemingly inconsiderable contribution. In the mean-time the
master

master unites, by apt junctures and articulations, parts which were not known to be susceptible of connection; combines the separate divisions without difficulty, because the several workmen have only been individually helping to accomplish the original plan which had previously existed in his inventive mind.

The prescience of God is among his peculiarly incommunicable attributes. Happy is it for us indeed that it *is* incommunicable, for if any portion of it were imparted to us, how inconceivably would the distress of human life be aggravated! But if we allow his omniscience, we cannot doubt his Providence. He would not foresee contingencies, for which he could not provide. His attributes are in fact so interwoven that it is impossible to separate them. His omniscience foresees, his understanding, which is infinite, arranges, his sovereignty decrees, his omnipotence executes the purposes of his will. — His wisdom may see some things to be best for awhile to answer certain temporary purposes, which would not be good for a continuance,

tinuance. When the present appointment shall have answered the end to which it was determined, a new one, to which that was preparatory, takes place. The two arrangements may appear to us not to be of a piece, to be even contradictory; while yet this determination and this succession are perfectly consistent in the mind of a being who sees all things at once, and "calls things that are not as though they were." God's view of all men and all events throughout all ages, is one clear, distinct, quick, simultaneous view. Infinite knowledge takes in present, past, and future in one comprehensive survey, pierces through all distance at a glance, and collects all ages into the focus of the existing moment.

Once thoroughly grounded and established in this faith and sense of the Divine perfections, we shall never look upon any thing to be so monstrous or so minute, so insignificant or so exorbitant, as to be out of the precincts and controul of eternal Providence. We shall never reduce, if the allusion may be forgiven, the powers of omnipotence to a level
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with that of some Indian Rajah who has a territory too unwieldy for his management, or of an Emperor of China who has more subjects than one monarch can govern.

We ask why evil rulers are permitted? — We answer, though rather mechanically, our own question, by acknowledging that they are the appointed scourges of divine displeasure. Yet God does not delegate his *authority* to the oppressor, though he employs him as his instrument of correction; he still keeps the reins in his own hand. And besides that an offending world stood in need of the chastisement, these black instruments who are thus allowed to ravage the earth may be, in the scheme of Providence, unintentionally preparing the elements of moral beauty. When Divine displeasure has made barren a fruitful land “for the wickedness of them that dwell therein,” the ploughshare and the harrow which are sent to tear up the unproductive soil, know not that they are providing for the hand of the sower, who is following their rude traces in order to scatter the seeds of future riches and fertility.

Or

Or take the conflagration of a town. — They whose houses are burnt are objects of our tenderest commiseration. The scene, it we beheld it, would alike excite our terror and our pity. But, after we have mourned over the devastation, and seen that despair is fruitless, at length necessity impels to industry; — we see a new and fairer order of things arise; the convenience, symmetry, and beauty which spring out of the ashes make us eventually not only cease to regret the deformity and unsightliness to which they have succeeded, but almost reconcile us to the calamity which has led to the improvement.

Often have the earthquake, the hurricane, the bolt of heaven, kindling and throwing far and wide its baleful light on this earthly stage, realized in their ultimate effects this image. And we are reminded of a future, general conflagration, “when the elements shall melt with fervent heat and the earth itself shall be burned up,” which is to prove only the signal and the preparatory scene for

for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." Let us, in every stage leading to this final "restitution of all things," wait with patience for its sure completion. Let us, in the mean time, give credit to the great Author of the book of Fate for the consistency of its catastrophe!

When we peruse the compositions of a human author, we look for unity and consistency in his whole plan; we expect connection and relation between its several parts, and an entireness in the general combination. We are not so much delighted with a fine passage incidentally introduced, a short episode, of which we discern at once the rise and the end, and take in all the incidents and beauties at a single glance, as we are with the judgment which discovers itself in the distribution of the whole work, and the skill, not without difficulty discerned, which arranges, connects, and, as it were, links together the several divisions. Yet do we not sometimes presume to insinuate as if the great Author of all created nature cannot

reduce the complexity of its parts into one consistent whole? Do we not intimate objections as if there were no concert, no agreement in the works of the Almighty mind? Do not the same persons who can speak in raptures of a perfect poem, a perfect scheme of reasoning, a perfect plan in architecture, yet presume to suspect that the concerns of the universe are carried on with less system, and on a more imperfect design, than the rude sketches of a frail creature, who is crushed before the moth?

But if we go so far as to leave to God the direction of the natural world, because we know not well, after all, to whom else to commit its management, yet we frequently make little scruple to take the government of the moral world into our own hands. If we consent to his ruling matter, we reluctantly allow that he governs mind. We reason as if we suspected that the passions of men lay beyond his controul, and that their vices have overturned his dominion. But we should practically call to mind what is the daily language
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of our lips, not only that *His* is “the kingdom,” but that the “power” is the source, and “the glory” the result of his administration. He does not, it is true, by an arbitrary compulsion of men’s minds, rob them of that freedom by which they offend him, nor by a force on their liberty, prevent those sins and follies which, if he arbitrarily hindered, he would convert rational beings into mechanical ones; but he turns their sins and follies to such uses, that while by the voluntary commission of them they are bringing down destruction on their own heads, they are not impeding his purposes.

Nor does Providence in his wide arrangements, exclude the operation of subordinate causes and motives, but allows them to assist the greater, and thereby to work his will; as subalterns in the battle contribute severally their share to the victory, while, like those inferior causes, they are compelled to keep their ranks, and not to aspire to the command. As we have a higher end, we must have a supreme direction to our aims. Yet a lower

end is sometimes made a means to a higher, and assists its object without usurping its place. Some who begin by abstaining from evil, or set about doing good from a principle not entirely pure, are graciously led to the principle by doing or forbearing the action; and are finally landed at the higher point, from beginnings far below those at which *we* might rashly have asserted they could only set out with any hope of success.

Though this may not very frequently occur, yet as it is by means God works, rather than by miracles; and as the world does not overflow with real piety, what a chaos would this earth become, if God did not permit inferior motives to operate to a certain degree for the general good! Many, whom the utmost stretch of charity cannot induce us to believe that they are acting from the purest principles, are yet contributing to the comfort and good order of society. Though they are sober only from a regard to their health, yet their temperance affords a good example; though they are prudent
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from no higher motive than the love of money, yet their frugality keeps them within the same bounds as if they were influenced by a better motive; though they may be liberal only to raise their reputation, yet their liberality feeds the hungry; though they are public spirited merely from ambition, yet their patriotism, by rousing the spirit of the country, saves it. If such right actions, performed from such low motives, can look for no future retribution;—if, being done without reference to the highest end, they do not advance the eternal interests of the doer, nor the glory of God, they are yet his instruments for promoting the good of others, both by utility and example. On this ground we may be thankful that there is so much refinement, generosity and politeness among the higher orders of society, while we confess that, tear away the action from its motive, sunder the virtue from its legitimate reference, the act and the virtue lose their present character and their ultimate reward.

The means by which an infinitely wise God often promotes the most important plans, are apt illustrations of the blindness and obliquity of man's judgment. May we be allowed to offer an instance or two, in which human wisdom would probably have taken a course, in the appointment of instruments and events, directly opposite to that pursued by infinite wisdom? What earthly judge, if he had been questioned as to the means likely to produce one of the strongest evidences of the truth of Christianity to unbelievers, but would have named an agreement between Jews and Christians, as its fullest corroboration? If we ourselves had an important cause depending—for instance, the ascertaining our right to a litigated estate;—If the success of the trial depended on the testimony of the witnesses, and on the authenticity of our title-deeds, whose testimony should we endeavour to obtain; into whose hands should we wish our vouchers to be committed? According to all human prudence should we not desire witnesses who

had

had no known hostility to us ; should we not object to a jury of avowed enemies ; and should we not refuse to lodge our records in the hands of our opponents ? But His wisdom, in whose fight ours is folly, has seen fit to make one of the most striking proofs of the truth of Christianity depend on the living miracle of the enmity of the Jews ; “ to them also were committed the oracles of God,” so that to both their ancient testimony and their present opposition we are to look for the most striking proofs of a religion which they behold with perpetual hatred. And now that Christianity is actually made to stand upon such evidence, what test can be more satisfactory ? Reason itself owns its validity ; for what collusion can now be charged upon the concurrent witnesses to Christianity, when each party in court is decidedly at variance with the other ? Who can rationally question the strength of that title which is contained in their genuine archives—that evidence resulting from their hereditary denial of facts, of which they per-

sist to reverence the predictions? Where can we more confidently look for the truth of a religion they detest, than to the verification conferred on it by their original history, their irreverfible antipathy, their actual condition, and exifting character?

To venture another fpecimen. If *we* had prefumed to point out instruments for the destruction of Jerufalem, we fhould probably have thought none fo appropriate as Conftantine: we might have fuppofed the firft christian emperor would have been the fitteft avenger of the Redeemer's blood. Omnifcience felected for the awful retribution a Pagan prince, a virtuous one it is true, but one who feemed to have no perfonal interest in the bufinefs, one to whom Jews and Christians, as fuch, were alike indifferent. While this utter defolation was the obvious accomplishment of a prophecy, which was to be a lafting evidence of the truth of our religion, the choice of the deftroyer was one of thofe "fecret things which belong to God," and is only to be alleged as a proof that "his ways are not our ways."

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We will advert to another event, the most important since the incarnation of him whose pure worship it has restored, the Reformation. This occurrence is a peculiarly striking instance of our ignorance of the operations of supreme wisdom, and of the means which, to our short sight, seem fit or unfit for the accomplishment of his purposes. If ever the hand of Providence was conspicuous as the meridian sun, it was so in this mighty work—it was so, in the selection of apparently discordant instruments—it was so, in over-ruling the designs of some, to a purpose opposite to their intention, in making the errors of others contribute to the general end. If this grand scheme had been exposed to *our* review for advice, if *we* had been consulted in its formation and its progress, how should we have criticised both the plan and its conductors? How should we have censured some of the agents as inadequate, condemned others as ill chosen, rejected one as unsuited, another as injurious! One critic would have insisted that the vehemence of Luther would mar

any enterprize it might mean to advance; that so impetuous a projector would inevitably obstruct the establishment of a religion of meekness. Another would have pronounced, that among the human faculties, wit was, of all others, the least likely to assist the cause of piety; yet did Erasmus, by his exquisite satires on the ignorance and superstition of the priests, as completely contradict this opinion, as Luther, by his magnanimity and heroic perseverance, triumphantly overturned the other. This inconsiderate, blustering Henry, the human counselor, would have said, will ruin the cause, by uniting his hostility to the reformers, with his inconsistent resistance to the papal power; and yet this cause, his very perverseness contributed to promote. Another censor would have been quite certain that the timid policy and cautious feeling of Charles the Wise would infallibly obstruct those measures which they were actually tending to advance. Who among us, if his opinion had been asked, would not have fixed on the Pontiff of

of Rome and the Emperor of the Turks, as the last human beings to be selected for promoting the reformed Religion? Who would have ventured to assert that the money raised by indulgences, through the profligate venality of Leo, for building Saint Peter's in his own metropolis, was actually laying the foundation of every Protestant church, in Britain—in Europe—in the world? Who could have predicted, that the Imperial Mussulman, in banishing learning from his dominions, was preparing, as if by concert, an overwhelming antagonist to the sottish ignorance of the Monks? All these things, separately considered, we, in our captious wisdom, should have pronounced calculated to produce effects directly contrary to the actual result; yet these ingredients, which had no natural affinity, amalgamated by the Almighty hand, were made to accomplish one of the most important works that infinite wisdom, working by human means, has ever effected.

CHAP. III.

Practical Uses of the Doctrine of Providence.

WE do not sufficiently make the doctrine of Providence a practical doctrine.— That the present dark dispensations which afflict the earth are indications of Almighty displeasure few dispute ; but having admitted the general fact, who almost does not ascribe the cause of offence to others ? How few consider themselves as awfully contributing to draw down the visitation ! We look with an exclusive eye to the abandoned and the avowedly profligate, and ascribe the whole weight of the divine indignation to their misdeeds. But we forget that, when a sudden tempest threatened destruction to the ship going to Tarshish, in which there was only Jonah who feared God, those who enquired into the cause of the storm found

him

him to be the very man. The cause of the present desolating storm, as a pious divine observed of that which darkened his day, may as probably be the offences of professing Christians, as the presumptuous sins of the bolder transgressor. This apprehension should set us all on searching our hearts, for we cannot repent of the evil of which we are not conscious. It should put us upon watching against negligence; it should set us upon distrusting a false security, upon examining into the ground of our confidence. No dependence on the goodness of our spiritual condition, no trust in our exactness in some peculiar duties, no fancied superiority of ourselves to others, no exemption from gross and palpable disorders, should soothe us into a belief that we have no concern in the visitation. Throwing off their own guilt upon others was the second sin of the first offenders.

Another practical use of the doctrine of Providence is, to enable us to maintain a composed frame of spirit under his ordinary dispensations.

dispensations. If we kept up a sense of God's agency in common as well as in extraordinary occurrences—if we were practically persuaded that nothing happens but by divine appointment, it might still those fluctuations of mind, quiet those uncertainties of temper, conquer that unreasonable exaltation or depression, which arise from our not habitually reflecting that all things are determined in number, or weight, or measure by infinite love. If we acted under the full conviction that He who first set the world in motion governs every creature in it—that we do not take our place upon that stage in space, or that period in time, which we chuse, but where and when *He* pleases; that it is he who “ordereth the bounds of our habitation, and fixeth our lot in life,” we should not only contemplate with sober awe the strange events of the age in which we may be living, but cheerfully submit to our individual difficulties, as arising from the same predisposition of causes. Our neglecting to cultivate this train of thought may ac-

count for those murmurs which arise in our hearts, both for the public calamities of the world, and the private vexations of life.

If we took God into the account, we should feel that, as rational subjects of his moral government, we are bound to submit to it: we should not indulge discontent and resentment at events which we should then allow were either by his appointment or permission, as we now acknowledge in the more extraordinary cases. But how few are there who think themselves obliged to endure, without repining, the effects of accident, or the provocations of men? and this is because they see only the proximate cause, and do not perceive that God is the grand efficient. In our difficulties, if the sense of his presence were as strongly impressed upon us as the trial is powerfully felt, it would make the heart strong, and render the temptation feeble. Nor would it only strengthen us under temptation, but sustain us under affliction; we should become both humble by correction, and patient under it; we

we should be grateful in prosperity, without being elated by it. A deep conviction of God's authority over us, and his property in us, would also make us kind to others as an acknowledgment that all is his. The very Heathen entertained some sense of his sovereignty; they acknowledged at least their victories to proceed from him, when they dedicated their spoils *to the deliverer*.

If we maintained this constant sense of his providential government, we should be more instant in prayer, we should more fervently supplicate him in our distresses, and more devoutly adore him for his mercies. The recognition of his sovereignty infers the duty of prayer to him, of implicit trust in him, of unqualified submission to him; for the same argument which proves that he should govern, makes it right that we should obey; and the avowal of that obedience is alike consistent with the character of the subject, and the claims of the sovereign. Thus used, there is no consolation to an afflicted world like that which is derived from the position

contained in the proclamation of the imperial penitent of Babylon, "that the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men;" that he ruleth not by an arbitrary will, but, to borrow the emphatical language of the Apocalypse, by the perfections of THE MIND THAT HATH WISDOM.

But, as we seem virtually to divide the affairs of the world into two portions, we talk as if we did not think certain ordinary trials considerable enough to come from God, nor of course to require that we should meet them with temper. Under these, therefore, we make ourselves, what amends we can for the vexation of trials more severe, by indulging fretfulness, secure of impunity. But let us be assured of these two things, if it be a trial at all, it comes from God; if it disturb our peace, however trivial in itself, it is not small to us, and therefore claims submission. It is worth our observation that they who are ready to quarrel with Omnipotence for the infliction of pain and suffering, poverty and distress, seldom arraign him

him for their intellectual or moral deficiencies. Most men are better satisfied with their allotment of capacity than of health; of virtue, than of riches; of skill, than of power. We seldom grudgingly compare our mental endowments with those of others who are obviously more highly gifted, while we are sufficiently forward to repine at their superiority in worldly advantages. Though too sensibly alive to the narrower limits in which our fortune is confined, we do not lament our severer restrictions in the article of personal merit. In the latter instance vanity supports as completely as in the former envy disturbs.

Most of the calamities of human life originate with ourselves. Even sickness, shame, pain, and death were not originally the infliction of God. But out of many evils, whether sent us by his immediate hand, or brought on us by our own faults, much eventual good is educed by Him, who by turning our suffering to our benefit, repairs by grace the evils produced by sin. With-
out.

not being the author of evil, the bare suggestion of which is blasphemy, he converts it to his own glory, by causing the effects of it to promote our good. If the virtuous suffer from the crimes of the wicked, it is because their imperfect goodness stood in need of chastisement. Even the wicked, who are suffering by their own sins, or the sins of each other, are sometimes brought back to God by mutual injuries, the sense of which awakens them to compunction for their own offences. God makes use of the faults even of good men to shew them their own insufficiency, to abase them in their own eyes, to cure them of vanity and self-dependence. He makes use of their smaller failings, to set them on the watch against great ones; of their imperfections, to put them on their guard against sins; of their faults of inadvertency, to increase their dread of such as are wilful. This superinduced vigilance teaches them to fear all the resemblances, and to shun all the approaches to sin. It is a salutary fear, which keeps them
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from using all the liberty they have ; it leads them to avoid, not only whatever is decidedly wrong, but to stop short of what is doubtful, to keep clear of what is suspicious ; well knowing the thin partitions which separate danger from destruction. It teaches them to watch the buddings and germinations of evil, to anticipate the pernicious fruit in the opening blossom.

The weakness and inactivity of our faith expose us to continual distrust. When we ourselves are idle, we are disposed to suspect that the Omnipotent is not at work. That process which we do not see, we are too much inclined to suspect is not going on. From this unhallowed egotism, where we are not the prime movers, we fancy that all stands still. The various parts of the scheme of Providence are sometimes connected by a thread so fine as to elude our dim sight ; but, though it may be so attenuated as to be invisible, it is never broken off. The plan is carrying on, and the work, perhaps, about to be accomplished,
while

while we are accusing the Great Artificer, as if he were capable of neglect, or liable to error. But if, after tracing Providence through many a labyrinth, we seem to lose sight of him : if, after having lost our clue, we are tempted to suspect that his operation is suspended, or that his agency has ceased, he is working all the time out of sight — he is proceeding, if the comparison may be allowed, like the fabled Arethusa, whose stream having disappeared in the place to which it had been followed up, is still making its way under ground ; though we are not cured of our incredulity, till we again discover him, bursting forth like the same river, which, having pursued its hidden passage through every obstruction, rises once more in all its beauty in another and an unexpected place.

But even while we are rebelling against his dispensations, we are taking our hints in the economy of public and private life, from the economy of Providence in the administration of the world. We govern our
country

country by laws emulative of those by which he governs his creatures:—we train our children by probationary discipline, as he trains his servants. Penal laws in states, like those of the Divine Legislator, indicate no hatred to those to whom they are proclaimed, for every man is at liberty not to break them; they are enacted in the first instance for admonition rather than chastisement, and serve as much for prevention as punishment. The discipline maintained in all well-ordered families is intended not only to promote their virtue, but their happiness. The intelligent child perceives his father's motive for restraining him, till the act of obedience having induced the habit, and both having broken in his rebellious will, he loves the parent the more for the restraint: on the other hand, the mismanaged and ruined son learns to despise the father, who has given him a licence to which he has discernment enough to perceive he owes the miseries consequent upon his uncurbed appetites.

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It is however to be lamented, that this great doctrine of God's universal superintendence is not only madly denied, or inconsistently overlooked by one class of men, but is foolishly perverted, or fanatically abused by another. Without entering upon the wide field of instances, we shall confine our remarks to two that are the most common. First, the fanciful, frivolous and bold familiarity with which this supreme dictation and government are cited on the most trivial occasions, and adduced in a manner dishonourable to infinite wisdom, and derogatory to supreme goodness. The persons who are guilty of this fault seem not to perceive, that it is not more foolish and presumptuous to deny it altogether than to expect that God's particular Providence will interpose, in order to save their exertions, or excuse their industry. For though Providence directs and assists virtuous endeavours, he never, by superceding them, encourages idleness, or justifies presumption.

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The highly censurable use to which some others convert this divine agency, is, when not only the pretence of trusting Providence is made the plea for the indolent desertion of their own duty; but an unwarrantable confidence in providential leadings is adopted to excuse their own imprudence. Great is the temerity, when Providence is virtually reproached for the ill success of our affairs, or pleaded as an apology for our own wilfulness, or as a vindication of our own absurdity, in the failure of some foolish plan, or some irrational pursuit. We have no right to depend on a supernatural interposition to help us out of difficulties into which we have been thrown by our misconduct, or under distresses into which we have been plunged by our errors. God, though he knows the prayers which we may offer, and accepts the penitence which we feel, will not use his power to correct our ill-judged labours, any otherwise than by making us smart for their consequences.

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The power of God, as it is not an idle, so it is not a solitary prerogative. It is indeed an attribute in constant exercise; it is not kept for state, but use; not for display, but exercise; and as it is infinite, one half of the concerns of the universe are not, as we intimated before, suspended, because he is superintending the other half. He is perpetually examining the chronicles of human kind, and inspecting the register of human actions — not like the King in the Palace of Shushan *, because “he cannot rest,” for Omniscience never slumbers or sleeps — nor like him to repair the wrongs of one man whose services had remained unrequited, but that, “beholding the evil and the good,” no services may go unnoticed and unrecompensed, from the earliest offering of pious Abel, to the latest oblation of faith in the end of time.

This view of things, and it is the view which the enlightened Christian takes, tends to correct his anger against second causes, and affords him such an assurance that every

* Ahafuerus.—Esther, chap. 6.

occurrence will be over-ruled by everlasting love for his eventual good — inspires him with such holy confidence in the promises of the Gospel, that he acquires a repose of spirit, not merely from compelled submission to authority, but from rational acquiescence in goodness. He feels that his confirmed belief in this universal agency is the only thing that can set his heart at rest, still its perturbations, moderate its impatience, soothe its terrors, confirm its faith, preserve its peace, or, when it has suffered a momentary suspension, restore it.

Nor does God exercise his Providence alone, either in signal instances of retribution, or in the hidden consolations of the believer; but those secret stings of conscience which goad and lacerate every guilty individual in any criminal pursuit — that lurking discontent which gives the lie to flattery, and mingles the note of discord with the music of acclamation — that unprompted misery of feeling which infuses wormwood into his sweetest pleasures, proceeds from the same providential infliction.

Some

Some men seem to admit a Providence on a scale which expands their ideas, but fancy it an affront to conceive of Him on one which they think contracts them. If they allow that he takes a sweeping view of nations, yet they imply that it would be too minute an exercise of his superintendence to inspect individuals. The truth is, as we intimated before, men are too much disposed to frame their conceptions of God by the limited powers and capacities of human greatness. They observe, that a king who controuls the affairs of a vast empire cannot possibly inspect the concerns of every private family, much less of every single subject. This limited capacity they unconsciously, yet irreverently, transfer to the King of kings. But as no concern is so vast as to encumber Omnipotence, so none is too diminutive to escape the eye of Omniscience. There is no argument for a general, but is also an argument for a particular Providence, unless we

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can prove that the whole is not made up of parts; that generals are not composed of particulars; that nations are not compounded of families; that societies are not formed of individuals; that chains are not composed of links; that sums are not made up of units; that the interests of a community do not grow out of the well-being of its members. The interests of a particular member, indeed, may sometimes appear to suffer from that which promotes the general good, yet he, by whose law the individual may seem to be injured, has means of remuneration or of comfort which may prevent the sufferer from being ultimately a loser. If, as we are assured upon his own authority, our tears are treasured up by him, will not their appropriate consolations be also provided? Though God, *whose footsteps are not known*, may act in some instances in a manner incomprehensible to us, yet if we allow that he acts wisely and holily in cases which we do comprehend, we should give him credit in the obscure and impenetrable

impenetrable cases, for he can no more act contrary to his attributes in the one instance than in the other.

Every intelligent being, therefore, should look up to divine Providence, not only as engaged in the government and disposal of states, but as exercised for his individual protection, peace and comfort ; — should look habitually to Him who confers favour without claim, and happiness without merit ; to Him whose veracity fulfils all the promises which his goodness has made—to Him whose pity commiserates the afflicted, whose bounty supplies the indigent, whose long suffering bears with the rebellious, whose love absolves the guilty, whose mercy in Christ Jesus accepts the penitent. Such is the fullness of that attribute which we sum up in a single word, *the goodness of God*. It is this goodness which influences his other attributes in our favour, attributes which would else necessarily act against creatures at once sinful and impotent. It makes that wisdom

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which sees our weakness, strengthen us, and that power which might overwhelm us, act for our preservation. Without this goodness, all his other perfections would be to us as the beauties of his natural creation would be, if the sun were blotted from the firmament—they might indeed exist, but without this illuminating and cherishing principle, as we should neither have seen nor felt them, so to us they could not be said *to be*.

Some Christians seem to view the Almighty as encircled with no attribute but his sovereignty. God, in establishing his moral government, might indeed have acted *solely* by his sovereignty. He might have pleaded no other reason for our allegiance but his absolute dominion. He might have governed arbitrarily, without explaining the nature of his requisitions: He might have reigned over us as a king, without endearing himself to us as a father. He might have exacted fealty, without the offer of remuneration.

ration. Instead of this, while he maintains his entire title to our obedience, he mitigates the austerity of command by the invitations of his kindness, and softens the rigour of authority by the allurements of his promises. In holding out menaces to deter us from disobedience, he balances them with the offered plenitude of our own felicity, and thus instead of terrifying, attracts us to obedience. If he threatens, — it is that by intimidating he may be spared the necessity of punishing; if he promises, — it is that we may perceive our happiness to be bound up with our obedience. Thus his goodness invites us to a compliance, which his sovereignty might have demanded on the single ground that it was his due. Whereas he seems almost to waive our duty as a claim, as if to afford us the merit of a voluntary obedience; though the very will to obey is his gift, he promises to reward it as if it were our own act. Thus his power, if we may hazard the expression, gives place to his goodness, and he presses us by tender-

ness almost more than he constrains us by authority. He even condescends to make our happiness no less a motive for our duty than his injunctions; hear his affectionate apostrophe, — “Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, then had thy peace been as a river!”

It was that his goodness might have the precedency of his Omnipotence, that he vouchsafed to give the Law in the shape of a covenant. He stooped to enter into a sort of reciprocal engagement with his creatures, — he condescended to stipulate with the work of his hands! But the consummation of his goodness was reserved for his work of Redemption. Here he not only performed the office, but assumed the name of LOVE; a name with which, notwithstanding all his preceding wonders of Providence and Grace, he was never invested till after the completion of this last, greatest act: — an act towards his pardoned rebels, not only of indemnity but promotion; — an
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act which the angels desire to scrutinize, and which man will never fully comprehend till he enters on that beatitude to which it has introduced him.

CHAP. IV.

“ Thy Will be done.”

TO desire to know the Divine will is the first duty of a being so ignorant as man ; to endeavour to obey it is the most indispensable duty of a being at once so corrupt and so dependant. The Holy Scriptures frequently comprize the essence of the Christian temper in some short aphorism, apostrophe, or definition. The essential spirit of the Christian life may be said to be included in this one brief petition of the Christian's prayer, “ THY WILL BE DONE ;” just as the distinguishing characteristic of the irreligious may be said to consist in following his own will.

There is a haughty spirit which, though it will not complain, does not care to submit. It arrogates to itself the dignity of enduring, without any claim to the meekness of yielding. Its silence is stubbornness,

its fortitude is pride ; its calmness is apathy without, and discontent within. In such characters it is not so much the will of God which is the rule of conduct, as the scorn of pusillanimity. Not seldom indeed the mind puts in a claim for a merit to which the nerves could make out a better title. Yet the suffering which arises from acute feeling is so far from deducting from the virtue of resignation, that, when it does not impede the sacrifice, it enhances the value. True resignation is the hardest lesson in the whole school of Christ. It is the ofteneft taught and the latest learnt. It is not a task which, when once got over in some particular instance, leaves us master of the subject. The necessity of following up the lesson we have begun, presents itself almost every day in some new shape, occurs under some fresh modification. The submission of yesterday, does not exonerate us from the resignation of to-day. The principle, indeed, once thoroughly wrought into the soul, gradually reconciles us to the frequent demand

for its exercise, and renders every successive call more easy.

We read dissertations on this subject, not only with the most entire concurrence of the judgment, but with the most apparent acquiescence of the mind. We write essays upon it in the hour of peace and composure, and fancy that what we have discussed with so much ease and self-complacence, in favour of which we offer so many arguments to convince and so many motives to persuade, cannot be very difficult to practise. But to convince the understanding and to correct the will is a very different undertaking; and not less difficult when it comes to our own case than it was in the case of those for whom we have been so coolly and dogmatically prescribing. It is not till we practically find how slowly our own arguments produce any effect on ourselves that we cease to marvel at their inefficacy on others. The sick physician tastes with disgust the bitterness of the draught, to the swallowing of which he wondered the patient had felt so much repugnance;

pugnance ; may the reader is sometimes convinced by the arguments which fail of their effect on the writer, when he is called, not to discuss, but to act, not to reason, but to suffer. The theory is so just and the duty so obvious, that even bad men assent to it ; the exercise so trying that the best men find it more easy to commend the rule than to adopt it. But he who has once gotten engraved, not in his memory but in his heart, this divine precept, **THY WILL BE DONE**, has made a proficiency which will render all subsequent instruction comparatively easy.

Though sacrifices and oblations were offered to God under the law by his own express appointment, yet he peremptorily rejected them by his prophets, when presented as substitutes instead of signs. Will he, under a more perfect dispensation, accept of any observances which are meant to supersede internal dedication — of any offerings unaccompanied by complete desire of acquiescence in his will ? “ My son, give me thine heart,” is his brief but imperative command.

command. But before we can be brought to comply with the spirit of this requisition, God must enlighten our understanding that our devotion may be rational, he must rectify our will that it may be voluntary, he must purify our heart that it may be spiritual.

Submission is a duty of such high and holy import that it can only be learnt of the Great Teacher. If it could have been acquired by mere moral institution, the wise sayings of the ancient philosophers would have taught it. But their most elevated standard was low; their strongest motives were the brevity of life, the instability of fortune, the dignity of suffering virtue, things within their narrow sphere of judging; things true indeed as far as they go, but a substratum by no means equal to the superstructure to be built on it. It wanted depth and strength and solidity for the purposes of support. It wanted the only true basis, the assurance that God orders all things according to the purposes of his will
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for our final good ; it wanted that only sure ground of faith by which the genuine Christian cheerfully submits in entire dependance on the promises of the Gospel.

Nor let us fancy that we are to be languid and inactive recipients of the divine dispensations. Our own souls must be enlarged, our own views must be ennobled, our own spirit must be dilated. An inoperative acquiescence is not all that is required of us : — and if we must not slacken our zeal in doing good, so we must not be remiss in opposing evil, on the flimsy ground that God has permitted evil to infest the world. If it be his will to permit sin, it is an opposition to his will when we do not labour to counteract it. This surrender, therefore, of our will to that of God, takes in a large sweep of actual duties, as well as the whole compass of passive obedience. It involves doing as well as suffering, activity as well as acquiescence, zeal as well as forbearance. Yet the concise petition daily slips off the tongue without our reflecting on the weight of the obligation

obligation we are imposing on ourselves. We do not consider the extent and consequences of the prayer we are offering, the sacrifices, the trials, the privations it may involve, and the large indefinite obedience to all the known and unknown purposes of infinite wisdom to which we are pledging ourselves.

There is no case in which we more shelter ourselves in generalities. Verbal sacrifices cost little, cost nothing. The familiar habit of repeating the petition almost tempts us to fancy that the duty is as easy as the request is short. We are ready to think that a prayer rounded in four monosyllables can scarcely involve duties co-extensive with our whole course of being; that, in uttering them, we renounce all right in ourselves, that we acknowledge the universal indefeasible title of *the blessed and only Potentate*; that we make over to Him the right to do in us, and with us, and by us, whatever he sees good for ourselves; whatever will promote his glory, though by means sometimes

as incomprehensible to our understanding, as unacceptable to our will, because we neither know the motive, nor perceive the end. These simple words express an act of faith the most sublime, an act of allegiance the most unqualified; and, while they make a declaration of entire submission to a Sovereign the most absolute, they are, at the same time, a recognition of love to a Father the most beneficent.

We must remember, that in offering this prayer, we may, by our own request, be offering to resign what we most dread to lose, to give up what is dear to us as our own soul; we may be calling on our heavenly Father to withhold what we are most anxiously labouring to attain, and to withdraw what we are most sedulously endeavouring to keep. We are renouncing our property in ourselves, we are distinctly making ourselves over again to Him whose we already are. We specifically entreat him to do with us what he pleases, to mould us to a conformity to his image, without which we shall never be resigned to his will. In
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short, to dispose of us as his infinite wisdom sees best, however contrary to the scheme which our blindness has laid down as the path to unquestionable happiness.

To render this trying petition easy to us, is one great reason why God, by such a variety of providences, afflicts and brings us low. He knows that we want incentives to humility, even more than incitements to virtuous actions. He shews us in many ways, that self-sufficiency and happiness are incompatible; that pride and peace are irreconcilable; that, following our own way, and doing our own will, which we conceive to be of the very essence of felicity, is in direct opposition to it.

“Christianity,” says Bishop Horfeley, “involves many paradoxes, but no contradictions.” To be able to say with entire surrender of the heart, “Thy will be done,” is the true liberty of the children of God, that liberty with which Christ has made them free. It is a liberty, not which delivers us from restraint, but which, free-
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ing us from our subjection to the senses, makes us find no pleasure but in order, no safety but in the obedience of an intelligent being to his rightful Lord. In delivering us from the heavy bondage of sin, it transfers us to the "easy yoke of Christ," from the galling slavery of the world to the "light burden" of him who overcame it.

This liberty in giving a true direction to the affections, gives them amplitude as well as elevation. The more unconstrained the will becomes, the more it fixes on one object; once fixed on the highest, it does not use its liberty for versatility, but for constancy; not for change, but fidelity; not for wavering, but adherencce.

It is, therefore, no less our interest, than our duty, to keep the mind in an habitual posture of submission. "Adam," says Dr. Hammond, "after his expulsion, was a greater slave in the wilderness than he had been in the inclosure." If the barbarian ambassador came expressly to the Romans to negotiate from his country for permission to
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be their servants, declaring, that a voluntary submission, even to a foreign power, was preferable to a wild and disorderly freedom, well may the Christian triumph in the peace and security to be attained by a complete subjugation to Him who is emphatically called *the God of order*.

A vital faith manifests itself in vital acts. "Thy will be done," is eminently a practical petition. The first indication of the gaoler's change of heart was a practical indication. He did not ask, "Are there few that be saved," but, "What shall *I* do to be saved?" The first symptom St. Paul gave of his conversion, was a practical symptom: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He entered on his new course with a total renunciation of his own will. It seemed to this great Apostle, to be the turning point between infidelity and piety, whether he should follow his own will, or the will of God. He did not amuse his curiosity with speculative questions. His own immediate and grand concern engrossed his

his whole soul. Nor was his question a mere hasty effusion, an interrogative springing out of that mixed feeling of awe and wonder which accompanied his first overwhelming convictions. It became the abiding principle which governed his future life, which made him in labours more abundant. Every successive act of duty, every future sacrifice of ease, sprung from it, was influenced by it. His own will, his ardent, impetuous, fiery will, was not merely subdued, it was extinguished. His powerful mind indeed lost none of its energy, but his proud heart relinquished all its independence.

We allow and adopt the term *devotion* as an indispensable part of religion, because it is supposed to be limited to the act; but *devotedness*, from which it is derived, does not meet with such ready acceptance, because this is a habit, and an habit involves more than an act; it pledges us to consistency, it implies fixedness of character, a general confirmed state of mind, a giving up what we are, and have, and do, to God.

Devotedness

Devotedness does not consist in the length of our prayers, nor in the number of our good works, for, though these are the surest evidences of piety, they are not its essence. Devotedness consists in doing and suffering, bearing and forbearing in the way which God prescribes. The most inconsiderable duty performed with alacrity, if it oppose our own inclination; the most ordinary trial met with a right spirit, is more acceptable to him than a greater effort of our own devising. We do not commend a servant for his activity, if ever so fervently exercised, in doing whatever gratifies his own fancy: we do not consider his performance as obedience, unless his activity has been exercised in doing what we required of him. Now, how can we insist on his doing what contradicts his own humour, while we allow ourselves to feel repugnance in serving our heavenly Master, when his commands do not exactly fall in with our own inclination?

We must also give God leave, not only to take his own way, but his own time. The
appointment

appointment of seasons, as well as of events, is his. "He waits to be gracious." If he delays, it is because we are not yet brought to that state which fits us for the grant of our request. It is not he who must be brought about, but we ourselves. Or, perhaps, he refuses the thing we ask, in order to give us a better. We implore success in an undertaking, instead of which, he gives us content under the disappointment. We ask for the removal of pain; he gives us patience under it. We desire deliverance from our enemies; he sees that we have not yet turned their enmity to our improvement, and he will bring us to a better temper by further exercise. We desire him to avert some impending trial, instead of averting it, he takes away its bitterness; he mitigates what we believed would be intolerable, by giving us a right temper under it. How, then, can we say he has failed of his promise, if he gives something more truly valuable than we had requested at his hands?

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Some virtues are more called out in one condition of life, and some in another. The exercise of certain qualities has its time and place; but an endeavour after conformity to the image of God, which is best attained by submission to his will, is of perpetual obligation. If he does not require all virtues under all circumstances, there is no state or condition, in which he does not require that to which our church perpetually calls us, "an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart." We may have no time, no capacity, no special call for deeds of notorious usefulness; but whatever be our pursuits, engagements, or abilities, it will intrench on no time, require no specific call, interfere with no duty, to subdue our perverse will. Though the most severe of all duties it infringes on no other, but will be the more effectually fulfilled by the very difficulties attending on other pursuits and engagements.

We are so fond of having our own will that it is astonishing we do not oftener employ

ploy it for our own good ; for our inward peace is augmented in exact proportion as our repugnance to the Divine will diminishes. Were the conquest over the one complete, the enjoyment of the other would be perfect. But the Holy Spirit does not assume his emphatical title, the COMFORTER, till his previous offices have operated on the heart, till he has “ reprovèd us of sin, of righteousness, of judgment.”

God makes use of methods inconceivable to us, to bring us to the submission which we are more ready to request with our lips, than to desire with our hearts. By an imperceptible operation he is ever at work for our good ; he promotes it by objects the most unpromising, by events the most unlikely. He employs means to our shallow views the most improbable to effect his own gracious purposes. In every thing he evinces that his thoughts are not as our thoughts. He overrules the opposition of our enemies, the defection of our friends, the faults of our children — the loss of our fortune as

well as the disappointments attending its possession — the unsatisfactoriness of pleasures as well as the privation — the contradiction of our desires — the failure of plans which we thought we had concerted, not only with good judgment but pure intentions. He makes us sensible of our faults by the mischiefs they bring upon us; and acknowledge our blindness, by extracting from it consequences diametrically opposite to those which our actions were intended to produce.

Our love to God is stamped with the same imperfection with all our other graces. If we love him at all, it is as it were traditionally, hereditarily, professionally; it is a love of form and not of feeling, of education and not of sentiment, of sense and not of faith. It is at best a submission to authority, and not an effusion of voluntary gratitude, a conviction of the understanding, and not a cordiality of the affections. We rather assume we have this grace than actually possess it, we rather take it for granted on
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unexamined grounds, than cherish it as a principle from which whatever good we have must proceed, and from which, if it does not proceed, the principle does not exist.

Surely, say the oppugners of divine Providence, in considering the calamities inflicted on good men, if God loved virtue he would not oppress the virtuous. Surely Omnipotence may find a way to make his children good, without making them miserable. — But have these casuists ever devised a means by which men may be made good without being made humble, or happy without being made holy, or holy without trials? Unapt scholars indeed we are in learning the lessons taught! But the Teacher is not the less perfect because of the imbecility of his children.

If it be the design of Infinite Goodness to disengage us from the world, to detach us from ourselves, and to purify us to himself, the purification by sufferings seems the most obvious method. The same effect

could not be any otherwise produced, except by miracles, and God is an economist of his means in grace as well as in nature. He deals out all his gifts by measure. His operation in both is progressive. Successive events operate in one case as time and age in the other. As suns and showers so gradually mature the fruits of the earth, that the growth is rather perpetual than perceptible, so God commonly carries on the work of renovation in the heart silently and slowly, by means suitable and simple, though to us imperceptible, and sometimes unintelligible. Were the plans more obvious, and the process ostensible, there would be no room left for the operations of faith, no call for the exercise of patience, no demand for the grace of humility. The road to perfection is tedious and suffering, steep and rugged; our impatience would leap over all the intervening space which keeps us from it, rather than climb it by slow and painful steps. We would fain be spared the sorrow and shame of our own errors, of all their vexatious obstructions, all their dishonourable

able impediments. We would be completely good and happy at once without passing through the stages and gradations which lead to goodness and happiness. We require an instantaneous transformation which would cost us nothing; the spirit of God works by a gradual process which costs us much. We would combine his favour with our self-indulgence; we would be spared the trials he has appointed without losing the felicity he has promised. We complain of the severity of the operation, but the operation would not be so severe if the disease did not lie so deep.

Besides the afflictions which God appoints, are not seldom sent to save us from those we should bring on ourselves, and which might have added guilt to misery. He prescribes, but it is that he may finally save. If "punishment is his strange," it is also his necessary "work." Even in the forest affliction, the loss of those we love, there may be a mercy impenetrable to us. God has, perhaps, laid up for us in heaven that

friend whom we might have lost in eternity, had he been restored to our prayers here. — But if the affliction be not improved, it is, indeed, unspeakably heavy. If the loss of our friend does not help to detach us from the world, we have the calamity without the indemnification; we are deprived of our treasure without any advantage to ourselves. If the loss of him we loved does not make us more earnest to secure our salvation, we may lose at once our friend and our soul. To endure the penalty and lose the profit, is to be emphatically miserable.

Sufferings are the only relics of the true cross, and when Divine grace turns them to our spiritual good, they almost perform the miracles which blind superstition ascribes to the false one. God mercifully takes from us what we have not courage to offer him; but if, when he resumes it, he sanctifies the loss, let us not repine. It was his while it was ours. He was the proprietor while we were the possessors.

Though we profess a general readiness to submit to the Divine will, there is
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nothing in which we are more liable to illusion. Self-love is a subtle casuist. We invent distinctions. We too critically discriminate between afflictions which proceed more immediately from God, and disappointments which come from the world. To the former we acknowledge, in words at least, our willingness to submit. In the latter, though equally his dispensation, we seem to feel justified in refusing to acquiesce. God does not desire us to inflict punishments on ourselves, he only expects us to bear with patience those he inflicts on us, whether they come more immediately from himself or through the medium of his creatures.

Love being the root of obedience, it is no test of that obedience if we obey God only in things which do not cross our inclinations, while we disobey him in things that are repugnant to them. Not to obey except when it costs us nothing is rather to please ourselves than God, for it is evident we should disobey him in these also if the allurements were equally powerful in these cases

as in the others. We may, indeed, plead in apology that the command we resist is of less importance than that with which we comply; but this is a false excuse, for the authority which enjoins the least, is the same with that which commands the greatest; and it is the authority to which we are to submit, as much as to the command.

There is a passage in St. Luke which does not seem to be always brought to bear on this point as fully as it ought: "Unless a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." This does not seem to be quite identical with the command in another place, that "a man should sell all that he has," &c. When the Christian world, indeed, was in its infancy, the literal requisition in both cases was absolutely necessary. But it appears to be a more liberal interpretation of the command, as "forsaking" all that we have, extends to a full and entire consecration of ourselves to God, a dedication without reserve, not of fortune only, but of every desire, every faculty, every inclination,

tion, every talent, a resignation of the whole will, a surrender of the whole soul. It is this surrender which *alone sanctifies* our best actions. It is this pure oblation, this offering of unshared affection, this unmaimed sacrifice, which is alone acceptable to God, through *that full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction*, made for the sins of the whole world. Our money he will not accept without our good will, our devotions without our affections, our services without our hearts. Like the prevaricating pair, whose duplicity was punished by instant death, whatever we keep back will annihilate the value of what we bring. It will be nothing if it be not all.*

* Acts, chap. v.

CHAP. V.

On Parable.

IT is obvious, that the reason why mankind, in general, are so much delighted with allegory and metaphor, is, because they are so proportioned to our senses, those first inlets of ideas. Ideas gained by the senses quickly pass into the region of the imagination; and from thence, more particularly the illiterate and uninformed, fetch materials for the employment of their reason.

Little reaches the understanding of the mass but through this medium. Their minds are not fitted for the reception of abstract truth. Dry augmentative instruction, therefore, is not proportioned to their capacity; the faculty by which a right conclusion is drawn, is, in them, the most defective; they rather feel strongly than judge accurately;

rately ; and their feelings are awakened by the impression made on their senses.

The connection of these remarks with the subject of instruction by parable, is obvious. It is the nature of parable to open the doctrine which it professes to conceal. By engaging attention and exciting curiosity, it developes truth with more effect than by a more explicit exposition. By laying hold on the imagination, parable insinuates itself into the affections, and, by the intercommunication of the faculties, the understanding apprehends the truth which was proposed to the fancy.

There is commonly found sufficient rectitude of judgment in the generality to decide fairly on any point within their reach of mind, if the decision neither opposes their interest nor interferes with their prejudice. If you can separate the truth from any personal concern of their own, their verdict will probably be just ; but if their views are clouded by passion, or biased by selfishness, that man must possess a more than ordinary

degree of integrity who decides against himself and in favour of what is right.

In the admirably devised parable of Nathan, David's eager condemnation of the unsuspected offender is a striking instance of the delusion of sin and the blindness of self-love. He who had lived a whole year in the unrepented commission of one of the blackest crimes of the decalogue, and who, to secure to himself the object for which he had committed it, perpetrated another almost more heinous, and that with an hypocrisy foreign to his character, could in an instant denounce death on the imaginary offender for a fault comparatively trifling. The vehemence of his resentment even overstepped the limits of his natural justice, in decreeing a punishment disproportioned to the crime, while he remained dead to his own deep delinquency. A pointed parable instantly surprised him into the most bitter self-reproach. A direct accusation might have inflamed him before he was thus prepared; and, in the one case, he might have

10 punished

punished the accuser, by whom, in the other, he was brought to the deepest self-abasement. The prudent prophet did not rashly reproach the King with the crime he wished him to condemn, but placed the fault at such a distance, and in such a proper point of view, that he first procured his impartial judgment, and afterwards his self-condemnation. An important lesson, not only to the offender, but to the reprover.

He "who knew what was in man," and who intended his religion, not for a few critics to argue upon, but for a whole world to act upon, frequently adopted the mode of instructing by allegory. Though he sometimes condescended to unveil the hidden sense, by disclosing the moral meaning, in some short, but most significant comment; yet he usually left the application to those whom he meant to benefit by the doctrine. The truth which spoke strongly to their prejudices, by the veil in which it was wrapped, spared the shame while it conveyed the instruction, and they probably found a gratification in the ingenuity

genuity of their own solution which contributed to reconcile them to the sharpness of the reproof.

The most unjust and prejudiced of the Jews were, by this wise management, frequently drawn in to give an unconscious testimony against themselves; this was especially the case in the instance of the householder and his servants. Had the truth they were led to deduce from this parable, been presented in the offensive form of a direct charge, it would have fired them with inexpressible indignation.

Christians who abound in zeal, but are defective in knowledge and prudence, would do well to remember that *discretion* made a remarkable, though not disproportionate part, of the Redeemer's character; he never invited attack by imprudence, or provoked hostility by intemperate rashness. When argument was not listened to, when persuasion was of no avail, when even all his miracles of mercy were misrepresented, and his divine beneficence thrown away, so that all

farther

farther attempts to do good were unavailing, *he withdrew to another place* ; there, indeed, to experience the same malignity, there to exercise the same compassion.

The divine Author of our religion gave also the example of teaching, not only by parable, but by simple propositions, detached truths, pointed interrogations, positive injunctions, and independent prohibitions, rather than by elaborate and continuous dissertation. He instructed, not only by consecutive arguments, but by invitations, and dissuatives adapted to the feelings, and intelligible to the apprehensions of his audience. He drew their attention by popular allusions, delighted it by vivid representations, and fixed it by reference to actual events. He alluded to the Galileans, crushed by the falling tower, which they remembered—to local scenery—the vines of Gethsemane, which they beheld, while he was descanting respectively upon repentance, and upon himself, as the “true vine.” By these simple, but powerful and suitable methods, he

9

brought

brought their daily habits, and every-day ideas, to run in the same channel with their principles and their duties, and made every object with which they were surrounded contribute its contingent to their instruction.

The lower ranks, who most earnestly sought access to his person, could form a tolerably exact judgment on the things he taught, by the aptness of his allusions to what they saw, and felt, and heard. The humble situation he assumed, also prevented their being intimidated by power, or influenced by authority. It at once made their attendance a voluntary act, and their assent an unbiassed conviction. The questions proposed with a simple desire of instruction, were answered with condescending kindness; those dictated by curiosity or craft, were repelled with wisdom, or answered, not by gratifying importunity, but by grafting on the reply some higher instruction than the enquirer had either proposed or desired. Where a direct answer would, by exciting prejudice, have impeded usefulness, he evaded

evaded the particular question by enforcing from it some general truth. On the application of the man whose brother had refused to divide the inheritance with him — in declining to interfere judicially, he gave a great moral lecture of universal use against avarice, while he prudently avoided the subject of the particular litigation.

His answer to the entangling question, “And who is my neighbour?” suggested the instructive illustration of the duty to a neighbour, in that brief, but highly finished apologue of the good Samaritan. The Jews, who would never have owned that a Samaritan was their neighbour, were, by this pious management, drawn in to acknowledge, that every man, without regard to country, who was even of a hostile country, if he needed their assistance, was their neighbour. In this slight outline, three characters are sketched with so much spirit and distinctness, that, as Mr. Boyle says of Scripture truths in general, they resemble those portraits, whose
eyes,

eyes, every one who enters the room, fancies are fixed on him.

False zeal, which he generally found associated with pride and hypocrisy, was almost the only vice which extorted from him unmitigated severity: if he sometimes corrected presumption and repelled malicious inquisitiveness, he uniformly encouraged distress to approach, and penitence to address him. The most indirect of his instructions inculcated or encouraged goodness. The most simple of his reasonings were irrefragable without the formality of syllogism; and his brief, but powerful persuasions, went straight to the heart, which the most elaborate discussions might have left unmoved. Every hearer, however illiterate, would at once seize his meaning, except those who found themselves interested in not understanding it; every spectator, "if they believed not him, would believe his works," if pride had not blinded their eyes, if prejudice had not barred up their hearts.

Thus,

Thus, if in the Gospels, the great doctrines of religion are not always conveyed in a didactic form, or linked with logical arrangement, some important truth meets us at every turn, is held out in some brief sentence; some hint is dropped that may awaken, recall, quicken, or revive perpetual attention. The same spirit pervades every part; we are reminded without being fatigued; and, whatever is the point to be pressed, some informing, alarming, or consoling doctrine is extracted from it, or grows out of it.

The Scriptures, however, are so far from setting aside the use of reason, that all their precepts are addressed to it. If they are delivered in a popular manner, and often in independent maxims, our reason, by combining them, methodizes the detached passages into a perfect system; so that by a combination, which it is in the power of every intelligent reader to make, a complete rule of practice is collected. The scattered precepts are embodied in examples, illustrated

trated by figures, and exemplified by parables. These always suppose the mind of the hearer to be possessed of a certain degree of common knowledge, without which the proposed instruction would be unintelligible. For, if the Gospel does not address its disciples as if they were philosophers or mathematicians, it always supposes them to possess plain sense and ordinary information ; to have acquaintance with human, if not with elevated life. The allusions and imagery with which it abounds would have been superfluous, if the hearers had not been previously acquainted with the objects and circumstances to which the image is referred, from which the parallel is drawn, to which the allusion is made.

Our heavenly Father, in his offers of illumination, does not expect we should open our mental eyes to this superinduced light, without opening our understandings to natural and rational information, but expects that we should apply the faculties bestowed, to the objects proposed to them. We put ourselves,

ourselves, therefore, in the fairest way of obtaining his assistance, when we most diligently use all the means and materials he has given us ; comparing together his works and his word ; not setting up our understanding against his revelation, but, with deep humility, applying the one to enable us to comprehend the other ; not extinguishing our faculties, but our pride ; not laying our understanding asleep, but casting it at the foot of the cross. We have dwelt on this point the more, from having observed, that some religious persons are apt to speak with contempt of great natural endowments as if they were not the gift of God, but of some inferior power : the prudently pious, on the other hand, while they use them to the end for which they were conferred, keep them in due subordination, and restrict them to their proper office. Abilities are the gift of God, and next to his grace, though with an immense interval, his best gift ; but are never so truly estimable as when they are dedicated to promote his glory,

Our

Our heavenly Instructor, still more to accommodate his parables to the capacities of his audience, adopted the broad line of instruction conveyed under a few strong features of general parallel, a few leading points of obvious coincidence, without attending to petty exactnesses, or stooping to trivial niceties of correspondence. We are not, therefore, to hunt after minute resemblances, nor to cavil at slight discrepancies. We should rather imitate his example, by confining our illustration to the more important circumstances of likeness, instead of raising such as are insignificant into undue distinction. This critical elaboration, this amplifying mode, which ramifies a general idea into all the minutiae of parallel, would only serve to divert the attention, and split it into so many divisions, that the main object would be lost sight of.

The author once heard a sermon which had for its text, "Ye are the salt of the earth." The preacher, a really good man, but wanting this discretion, not contented
with

with a simple application of the figure, instead of a general allusion to the powerfully penetrating and correcting nature of this mineral, instead of observing that salt was used in all the ancient sacrifices, indulged himself in a wide range, chemical and culinary, of all the properties of salt, devoting a separate head to each quality. A long discussion on its antiseptic properties, its solution and neutralization, led to rather a luxurious exhibition of the relishes it communicates to various viands. On the whole, the discourse seemed better adapted for an audience composed of the authors of the Pharmacopœia, or a society of cooks, than for a plain untechnical congregation.

But to return. — Who can reflect without admiration on the engaging variety with which the great Teacher labours to impress every important truth? Whenever different aspects of the same doctrine were likely still more forcibly to seize the attention, still more deeply to touch the heart, still more powerfully to awaken the conscience, he

he does not content himself with a single allegory. In his awful exhibition of the inestimable value of an immortal soul, he does not coolly describe the repentance of a single sinner as viewed with complacency by the highest order of created intelligences, but as adding "joy" to bliss already perfected in immortality. He does not limit his instruction to one metaphorical illustration of the delight of the heavenly hosts, but extends it to three, finishing the climax by that most endearing and touching of all moral and allegorical pictures, the restoration of the prodigal to his father's love.

But this triple use of the same species of allegory — each instance rising above the other, in beauty and in force, each adding fresh weight to one momentous point — he most emphatically employs in the last discourse previous to his final suffering; we mean in his sublime illustration of the solemnities of the last day, in three successive parables all tending to impress the same awful truth.

As

As he well knew every accessible point of the human heart, so there was none which he did not touch. But the grand circumstance which carried his instructions so directly home to the hearts and consciences of men, was, that he not only taught, but “did all things well.” His doctrines were so digested into his life, his instructions so melted into his practice, that it rendered goodness visible as well as perfect; and these analogies and resemblances, were not only admirably, but uniformly correspondent. He did not content himself like those heathen philosophers, to whose affable conduct in society, that of the blessed Redeemer has lately been so impiously compared, (though their motives differed, as much as the desire of converting sinners differs from delighting in them,) with exhibiting systems without morals, and a rule without a pattern, but the purity and perfection of his divine character gave light to knowledge, and life to document.

CHAP. VI.

On the Parable of the Talents.

OUR Redeemer's parables had been sometimes indicative of existing circumstances; sometimes predictive of events which related to futurity. After having, in his preceding allegories, by practical lessons, encouraged the prepared, and exhorted the unprepared to look for the kingdom of God, he closed his parabolical * instructions by an awful exhibition of their fitness or unfitness for that everlasting kingdom; in which he unfolds what their condition will be, when all mystery, all instruction, all preparation, shall be at an end; when every act of every being shall be laid as bare before the eyes of the whole assembled world, as it was seen in its commission by HIS, from whom nothing is hid. The last of these three prophetic scenes is indeed not so much a parable as a

* See Matthew xxv.

picture;

picture ; not so much an allegory as a literal representation : the solemn reality rises above all figure, and could never have been so forcibly conveyed as by this plain, yet most sublime, delineation.

The conclusion immediately to be drawn from the second of these parables, the parable of the Talents, is, that we have nothing that is properly our own, nothing that is underived from God. Every talent is a deposit placed in our hands, not for our exclusive benefit, but for the good of others. Whatever we possess which may either be improved to God's glory, or perverted to his dishonour, comes within the description of a talent. To use any of our possessions, therefore, as if we had an independent right to the disposal of them, is to usurp the prerogative of the Giver. Many, it is to be feared, will wait till that great disclosing-day which will throw a blaze of light on all motives, as well as all actions, before they will be convinced of the fallacy of that popular maxim, that a man may do what he will with his own. He has indeed a full right to his proprietorship with

respect to other men, but, with respect to God, he will find he had no exclusive property. Whatever portion of his possessions conscience ought to have turned over from vanity to charity, from sensuality to piety, he may find, too late, was not his own, but his who gave it him for other purposes.

God proportions his requisitions to his gifts. The one is regulated by the measure of the other. As duties and obligations are peculiar and personal, we are not to trench on the sphere of others. It is of our own talent, we must render our own account. A capacity, however, to know our duty, and to love and serve God, as they are indiscriminately bestowed, so the inquiry into the use made of them will be universal, while the reward or punishment will be individually assigned.

Deficiency and excess are the Scylla and Charybdis between which we seldom steer safely. If our talents are splendid, we are subject to err on the side of display; if mean, totally to suppress their exercise, apologizing for our indolence by our insignificance; but
mediocrity

mediocrity of talents is as insufficient an excuse for sloth, as superior genius is for vanity. The true way would be, to exercise the brightest faculties with humility, and the most inconsiderable with fidelity. The faithful and highly gifted servants in the parable, it is apparent, were so far from being lifted into pride, or seduced into negligence, by the greater importance of the trust committed to them, that they considered the largeness of their agency as an augmentation of their responsibility. *They* did the will of their lord without conditioning or debating. Their slothful associate, instead of doing it, contented himself with arguing about it. He who disputed much, had done nothing : he should have known, that Christianity is not a matter of debate, but of obedience.

There is no one doctrine of Holy Scripture either insignificant or merely theoretical. That which this parable teaches, is highly and specifically practical. The instruction to be deduced from it, is as extensive as the gifts of God to his creatures, as the obligations

of man to his benefactor. It is more especially practical, as it designates this world to be a scene of business, action, exertion, diligence. It inculcates the high and complicated duty, of laying out ourselves for the glory of our Maker, and the exercise of an implicit obedience to his will. God has not given us the command to work, without furnishing us with instruments with which to labour, and suitable materials to work upon. Our talents, such as *riches, power, influence, wisdom, learning, time*, are those instruments. The wants, helplessness, and ignorance of mankind, are the objects to which these instruments are to be applied. These talents are bestowed in various proportions, as to their value, as well as in different degrees, as to the quantity and number. He who is favoured with more abundant endowments, should mix with his gratitude for the gift, an abiding sense of his own greater accountableness. He who is slenderly furnished, should never plead that the inferiority of his trust is an excuse

excuse for his negligence. The conviction that the Great Master will not exact beyond the proportion of his gift, though an encouragement to those whom his providence has placed in a narrow sphere of usefulness, is no discharge from their diligence. Is it reasonable, that he who has less to do, should therefore do nothing? When little is expected from us, not to do that little enhances the crime; and it aggravates the ingratitude, when we convert our master's more moderate demands into a pretence for absolute supineness.

He who is not called upon to relieve the necessities, or to enlighten the ignorance of others, has still a weighty work upon his hands: he has the care of his own soul. If he is deficient in learning, and natural abilities—if he has little credit, and less fortune, he probably has time; he certainly has the means of religious improvement: so that, in this land of light and knowledge, especially now that universal instruction is happily become a national care, there is hardly such

a thing as innocent ignorance. Even of the lowest, of the least, a strict account will be required. To plead ignorance where they might have been taught, indolence because they had little to do, and negligence, because not much was expected, is only treasuring up innumerable reasons for aggravating their condemnation.

It is remarkable that of the several characters exhibited in the parable, the least endowed was the only one punished, his neglect being every way inexcusable. A lasting and awful lesson, that no inferiority can claim exemption from the general law of duty. If the right employment of the gift is an encouragement to the poorly endowed, as being easily exercised and amply rewarded; its abuse is an awakening call to every one. For, is it not fairly deducible from this instance, that if of those whose scale in society is low, whose intellectual powers are mean, or whose fortunes are narrow; if even of such, a strict account will

will be required, if even in these, mere deficiency was so harshly reprobated, mere nullity was so severely punished,—a sentence of most tremendous import must await those who employ rank and opulence to selfish and corrupt ends, or genius to pernicious purposes; the one debasing their own minds by sensuality, or corrupting others by examples of vice and prodigality; the other, devoting abilities so great, with profligacy so notorious, as to appear little less than “archangel ruined,” and drawing inferior spirits into the destruction in which they have plunged themselves.

But again:—if these several talents, individually conferred, when employed to wrong purposes, or not employed at all, will be rigorously punished; what sentence have they to expect, in whom is centered the splendid confluence of God’s gifts? What will be the eternal anathema pronounced on those who possessed aggregately talents, with every one of which, singly enjoyed, they might have rendered the

world about them better and happier? To reflect by whom they were bestowed, to what end designed, how they have been used, and what a reckoning awaits them, forms a combination of reflections too awful to be dwelt upon. From the anticipation of such complicated woe we turn with terror. The bare idea of a punishment which shall always torment, and never destroy, is insupportable. Yet how many believe this without being influenced by the belief! How many, by an unaccountable delusion, refuse to conform their lives to the injunctions of the Gospel, while they put their vices under the protection of its promises.

The parable informs us, that it was "after a long time," that the Lord required the account; so long, that the wicked think it will never come, and even the good are apt to persuade themselves that it will not come soon. Let not those, however, who are sitting at ease in their possessions, whether of nature or of fortune, to speak after the manner of men, fancy that the reckon-

ing which is delayed is forgotten. The more protracted the account, the larger will be the sum total, and, of course, the more severe the requisition. All delay, indeed, is an act of mercy; but mercy neglected, or abused, will enhance punishment in proportion as it aggravates guilt.

It is obvious that the servants in the parable had been in the habit of attending to their mercies. They seem never to have been unmindful of the exact value of what had been committed to them, "Lord, thou deliverest unto me five talents." If we do not frequently enumerate the mercies of God to us, we shall be in danger of losing sight of the giver, while we are revelling in the gift; of neglecting the application, and forgetting the responsibility. We should recollect, that his very employment of us is a high mark of favour; the use he condescends to make of us, augments our debt, and whenever he puts it in our way to serve him, he lays on us a fresh obligation.

tion, and confers on us an honourable distinction.

Though he that has most, and does most, has but "a few things," yet his remuneration shall be immense. It is his fidelity, and not his success; his zeal in improving occasions, and not the number or greatness of the occasions, that will be rewarded. There will always be an infinite disproportion between the work he has done, and the blessing attending it.

The expostulation of the unprofitable servant presents an awful lesson against distrust in God, and fallacious views of his infinitely perfect character. The very motive this false reasoner produces in his own vindication, is the strongest argument against him. If he "knew" that his lord was such a rigorous exactor, that was the very reason, why he should not have given in such a negative account. "I knew thou wast a hard master." Could a weightier argument have been advanced for a directly different conduct? Common prudence might

might have taught him that, with such a master, his only security was assiduous industry. The want of love of God was at the root of this, as it is of all sin.

How many listen to the sentence of this unworthy servant! How many allow the equity of his exclusion, and yet how few, comparatively, ask, with the agitated Apostles; "Lord, is it I?" This simple question, honestly put, and practically followed up, would render all comment vain, all exhortation superfluous. This self-application is the great end of the parable, the great end of Scripture, the great end of preaching, and the only end of hearing.

But do not too many of us, like him we are so ready to condemn, conceal our self-love under the assumption of modesty, and indulge our sloth under the humble pretence that we have no talent to exercise? But let us be assured it is the deadness of our spiritual affections, and not our mean opinion of ourselves, that is the real cause. The service of God is irksome, because his commands interfere with our self-indulgence.

Let

Let the lowly Christian, possessed of but his single talent, cheer his fainting heart by that beautifully condescending plea, with which the compassionate Saviour vindicated the modest penitent, who had no other way of demonstrating her affection but by pouring perfumes on his feet — SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD. A tendernefs of encouragement, which, if we consider by whom it was uttered, and to whom addressed, must convey consolation to the heart of the most poorly endowed and self-abasing Christian.

From natural feeling, from inward consciousness, from the notices of reason, the traces of hereditary opinion, and the analogy of things, independently of Revelation, we cannot avoid the belief that we are accountable beings. Our notions of right and wrong, of equity and judgment, our insuppressible forebodings, our fearful anticipations, the suggestions of natural conscience, all unite their several forces to fasten on the mind the belief that we shall be called to a definite account. Our intelligent nature, our rational powers, our voluntary agency, make

make us suitable subjects of God's moral government. His wisdom, power, omniscience, rectitude, and justice, render him supremely fit to be our final judge, and the dispenser of our eternal awards. But God, in his infinite goodness, has not, in this most important point, left us to the bare light of unassisted nature: he has not left us to be tossed about without rudder, or compass, on the boundless ocean of harassing conjecture. He has not abandoned us to the alternation of vain fears and unfounded hopes; to the sickly suggestions of a troubled fancy, the cruel uncertainties of doubt, and the cheerless darkness of ignorance. The expectation of a day of retribution is not the gloomy reverie of the superstitious, nor the wild vision of the enthusiastic. *He who cannot lie* has solemnly assured us, that he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by that Man whom He has sent, Christ Jesus.

The coming of this great day which nature suspected, and reason allowed, Scripture confirms.

confirms. It will at length arrive. The scrutiny so graphically exhibited by our Lord, will be realized in all its pomp of terrors. The sea shall give up its dead, and death and hell shall deliver up the dead which are in them, and every man shall be judged according to his works. And the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and the judgment shall be set, and the books opened, and the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works.

This universal examination into the human character, this critical dissection of the heart of man, from the first created being to him who shall be caught up alive in the air at Christ's second coming, shall infallibly take place. Blessed be Almighty forbearance, it is still in the power of every existing child of Adam to lighten to himself his apprehensions of that day. He may do more; he may convert terror into transport, by acting now as if he really believed it would one day come; by acting as he shall

then with he had acted. If "the terrors of the Lord persuade men," what effect should his mercy produce; that mercy which has given the universal warning to the whole human race in three consentaneous Parables, exhibited with a spirit of truth more resembling historic narrative, than prophetic anticipation! There is not one living being who now reads this page from whom that day is distant; to some it must be very near; to none perhaps nearer, than to her who now tremblingly presumes to raise the warning voice; — to her, to all, it is tremendously awful. Let none of us, then, content ourselves with a barren admiration of its solemnities, as if it were an affecting scene of a tragedy, invented to move the passions without rectifying them; to inspire terror, without quickening repentance. Let us not be struck by it as with a wonderful fact in history, which involves the interest of some one country with which we have no particular concern; or of some remote century disconnected with that in which our lot is cast.

cast. It is the personal, the individual, the everlasting concern of every rational being through all the rolls of time, till time shall be no more. It is the final, unalterable decision on the fate of every intelligent, and, therefore, every accountable creature, to whom God has revealed his will, to whom he has sent his Son, to whom he has offered the aid of his Spirit.

No wonder that the universal administration of final justice shall be manifested in the most awful pomp and splendor, when the eternal Son of the eternal Father, in the full brightness of his glory, shall be the judge; when the whole assembled universe shall be the subjects of judgment; when not only the deeds of every life, but the thoughts of every heart shall be brought to light; when, if *we* produce our works, the recording book will produce our motives; when every saint who acted as seeing Him who is invisible, shall not only see but share the glory in which he trusted; when the hypocrite shall behold him whom he
believed

believed without trusting, and mocked without deceiving; when the profligate shall witness the reality of what he feared, and the infidel shall feel the certainty of what he denied.

CHAP. VII.

On Influence, considered as a Talent.

[T] is at best but a selfish sort of satisfaction, though the poet calls it a delightful one, *to see others tossed about in a storm, while we are sitting in security, rejoicing, not because they are in danger, but because we are safe.* Christianity instructs us to improve on the sentiment. It teaches us to extract not only comfort and gratification from the comparison of our happier lot with that of the less favoured ; but in making the comparison, it reminds us to make it with reference to God, by emphatically asking, “ Who is it that maketh us to differ ? ”

But if we look around, not only on the external but on the moral and mental distinctions among mankind, and consider the ignorance, the miseries, and the vices of others, as a ground for our more abundant gratitude ;

gratitude; what sort of feeling will be excited in certain persons by a sight and sense of those miseries, those vices, and that ignorance, of which their own influence, or example, or neglect has been the cause? If we see any unhappy whom we might have relieved, any ignorant whom we ought to have instructed, any corrupt whose corruptions we never endeavoured to reform, but whom, perhaps, we have contributed to make what they are; in either of these cases, it is difficult to conceive any state of mind less susceptible of comfort, any circumstance more calculated to excite compunction. These instances may help men to a pretty just criterion by which to judge of their own character, since it is certain *they* never felt any true gratitude for their own mercies, who can look with indifference on either the temporal or spiritual distresses of others. And if no one ever truly mourned for his own sins who can be insensible to the sins of those around him, so no one can be earnest to promote his own salvation, who neglects
any

any fair opening of contributing to the salvation of others.

What an appalling reflection it is, that at the tremendous bar, a being already overwhelmed with the weight of his own offences, may have to sustain the addition of the amazing and unexpected load of all those, of which he has been the cause in others! The very lowest of the claims which religion has upon us, is, not to injure her, not to dishonour her, not to obstruct her good effect on others. Yet between this and her higher demands, there is frequently no intermediate state. There are few who are negatively religious.

Influence is a talent not only of undefinable but of universal extent. Who is there so insignificant as not to have his own circle, greater or smaller, made better or worse, by his society, his conduct, his counsels? That presumptuous but common consolation of a dying bed, *I have done no harm to any one*, is always the fallacious refuge of such

as have done little or no good. Man is no such neutral being.

It is not the design of the present considerations to insist so much on the more striking and conspicuous instances of misemployed influence, (for the ordinary state of life does not incessantly call them into action,) as on those overlooked, though not unimportant demands for its exertion, which occur in the every-day transactions of mankind, more especially among the opulent and the powerful.

Rank and fortune confer an influence the most commanding. All objects attract the more notice from being placed on an eminence, and do not excite the less attention, because they may deserve less admiration. In anticipating the scrutiny that will hereafter be made into the manner in which the rich and great have employed their influence, that powerful engine put into their hands for the noblest purposes, may we not venture to wish they had some disinterested friend, less anxious to please than to serve them,

them, who would honestly, as occasion might offer, interrogate them in a manner something like the following :—

“ Allow me, as a friend to your immortal interests, to ask you a few plain questions. Has your power been uniformly employed in discouraging injustice, in promoting particular as well as general good ; in countenancing religious as well as charitable institutions ; in protecting the pious, as well as in assisting the indigent ? Has your influence been conscientiously exerted in vindicating injured merit ; has it been employed in defending insulted worth against the insolence of the unfeeling, the scorn of the unworthy, the neglect of the unthinking ? Has it been exercised in patronizing modest genius, which would, without your fostering hand, have sunk in obscurity ?

“ Have you, in the recommendations which have been required of you, had an eye to the suitableness of the candidate for the place, rather than to a provision for an unworthy applicant, to the injury of the office ?

office? And have you honestly preferred the imperative claims of the institution to the solicitations, or even to the wants, of the individual? Have you never loaded a public, or injured a private, establishment, by appointing an unfit agent, because he was a burden on your own hands, or a charge on your own purse? Have you never promoted a servant who had “wasted your goods,” and with whom you parted for that very reason, to the superintendence of a charity, or to the management of an office, where you knew he would have a wider sphere, and a more uncontrouled power, of purloining public property, or wasting private bounty, than in that from which your prudence had discharged him?

To rise a step higher :—“ Have you never, if intrusted with a patronage over that peculiarly sacred office, “ which any one may well tremble to give or to receive,” been governed by a spirit of nepotism in the disposal of it, which you perhaps severely censure under a certain other establishment

most obviously corrupt? Have you never been engaged in promoting men, who, from their destitution of principle, are a dishonour to the profession in which you have been raising them, or, by the want of abilities, are disqualified for it? Have you never connived at the preferment of the weak or the wicked, to the exclusion of others whose virtues and talents eminently fitted them for the situation? Or, have you, rather, strenuously laboured to fix the meritorious in the place they were so qualified to fill, while you supplied the wants of the undeserving or incompetent relative out of your own purse? And have you habitually made a conscience of recommending adequate persons in preference to the unworthy and the unfit, though the latter belonged to your own little senate, or swelled your own large train?

“ Have you habitually borne in mind that important, but disregarded, maxim, that what you do by another is done by yourself, and not only carefully avoided oppression in
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your own person, but, rising superior to that selfish indolence, the bane, the grave of every nobler quality ; have you been careful that your agents do not exercise a tyranny which you yourself abhor, but which may be carried on under your name ? Your ignorance of such injustice will be of little avail, if, through supineness, you have sanctioned abuses which vigilance might have prevented, or exertion punished.

“ Have you unkindly denied access to your presence to the diffident solicitor, who has no other channel to preferment but your favour ; and if not able to serve him, have you softened your refusal by feelingly participating in his disappointment, instead of aggravating it by refusing to see and soothe him, when you could do no more ? Have you considered that, to listen to wearisome applications and pertinacious claims, is among the drawbacks of comfort necessarily appended to your station ? To examine into interfering pretensions, while it is a duty you owe to the applicant, is a salutary exercise

of patience to yourself ; it is also the only certain means you possess of distinguishing the meritorious from the importunate.

We dwell on this part of the subject the more earnestly, because it is to be feared that even the tender-hearted and the benevolent, from the facility of a yielding temper, from weariness of importunity, from a wish to spare their own feelings, as well as from a too natural desire to get rid of trouble, are frequently induced to confer and to refuse favours, not only against their principles and their judgment, but against their will. Yet as no virtue is ever possessed in perfection by him who is destitute of its opposite,—Have you been equally careful, never, for the sake of popularity or the love of ease, to awaken false hopes, and keep alive false expectations in your retainers, though you knew you had no prospect of ever making them good?—thus committing your own honour for the sake of swelling the catalogue of your dependents ; and, by insincerity and indecision, feeding them with
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delusive promises, when a firm negative, by extinguishing hope, might have put them on a more successful pursuit.

Some striking instances of delicate liberality, recorded of a late lamented statesman, have shown, that it is not too much to expect from human nature, that a man should exert his influence for the benefit of another, even though it were to his own disadvantage, and that he should be not only willing, but desirous, not to procure for himself the gratitude of the obliged person, nor to obtain his admiration; but would be contented, that, while he himself afforded all the benefit, an intervening agent should have all the credit. This disinterestedness is among the nicer criteria of a Christian spirit.

While we can with truth assign the most liberal praise to that spirit of charity which pre-eminently distinguishes the present period, we are compelled to lament that justice is not held in equal estimation by some of those who give the law to manners. This considerably diminishes their influence,

because it is the quality which, of all others, they most severely require in their dependants, as being that which is most immediately connected with their own interest. And how far from equitable is it, to blame and punish the statutable offence in petty men, whose breach of integrity is unhappily facilitated by continual opportunity, or induced by the pressure of want, while the rigorous exacter of justice is as defective in the practice, as he is strict in the requisition?

The species of injustice alluded to, consists much in that laxity of principle which admits of a scale of expence disproportioned to the fortune: this creates the inevitable necessity of remaining in heavy arrears to those who can ill afford to give long credit: in return, it induces in the creditor the habit, and almost the necessity, of enhancing the price of his commodity. The evil would be little, if the encroachment were only felt by those whose tardy payment renders exorbitance almost pardonable: but others, who

who practice the most exact justice, are involved in the penalty, without partaking in the offence; and the correct are taxed for the improbity of the dilatory. This dilapidating habit leads to an indolence in inspecting accounts; and the increasing unwillingness to examine into debts, increases the inability to discharge them; for debts, like sins, become more burdensome in proportion as people neglect to enquire into them.

And here, if we might be allowed a remark somewhat foreign to our immediate subject, it may be observed, that the low conception of justice of which we complain has infected not only morals, but religion; or rather, what began in our principle towards God, extends to our practice towards man. It is the attribute of which we make the least scruple to rob the Almighty; for it is a fashionable, though covert mode, of arraigning his justice, when we affect to exalt his character by representing him as too merciful to punish. Justice is not only

eminently conspicuous in her own central station, but gives life and light to other attributes. By cutting off superfluous expences, temperance and sobriety grow out of justice; and, what is subtracted from luxury, is carried over, without additional expence, to the account of beneficence.

The Holy Scriptures lay down some precise and indispensable rules for the practice of justice, while they leave great latitude, at least as to the selection of an individual acts, to charity. Justice can be maintained only by this distinct demand and rigid acquiescence, while charity would lose the nature and quality of benevolence, if it were under any such express and definite rules. Charity may chuse her object, but those of justice are chosen for her. It was, doubtless, in mercy, that no absolute rule or limitation is made respecting charity, that we might have the gratification of a voluntary delight in its exercise, for our nature is, in this respect, so kindly constituted, that, in
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minds not peculiarly ill formed, the call to beneficence is the call to enjoyment.

But the influence of the great, "the observed of all observers," descends into the social walks of life. The pinnacle on which they stand, makes their most trivial actions, and even words, objects of attention and imitation to those beneath them. The consciousness of this should be an additional motive for avoiding, in their ordinary conversation, not only what is corrupt, but whatever favours of levity and imprudence; the vanity of the little world is ready, not from mischief, but self-importance, to convert the thoughtless slips of the great into consequence; their most frivolous remarks are quoted, merely that the quoter may seize the only occasion he could ever find of shewing that he has been admitted to their company. This harmless little stratagem holds out a strong motive for those whose condition in life makes them subjects of observation, occasionally to let fall something that may be remembered, not merely because

they said it, but because it was worth saying. This remark applies to superiority of talents, to be considered in our next head, still more than of rank.

As the great and noble are sufficiently disposed to look with reverted eye back to their ancestral honours, it were to be wished that they were all as ready, as we are happy to say some of them are, to cast the same careful retrospect to the ancient usages of their illustrious houses. There was a time when family-devotion was considered as a kind of natural appendage to high rank, when domestic worship was almost as inseparably connected with the aristocracy, as the church with the state. The chapel was as much a part of the splendid establishment as the state-room. When the form of piety was thus kept up, the reality was more likely to exist. Even the appearance was a homage to religion, the very custom was an honourable recognition of Christianity. But, in the way of influence, it must have been of high importance; the domestics would have their

their sense of duty kept alive, and would with more alacrity serve those who they saw served God. It was a bond of political, as well as of moral union ; it was the only occasion on which " the rich and poor met together." There is something of a coalescing property in social worship. In acknowledging their common dependance on their common master, this equality of half an hour would be likely to promote subordination through the rest of the day. Take it in an inferior point of view, it was a useful discipline, it was a family muster-roll, a sort of domestic parade, which regularly brought the privates before their commanding officers, and maintained order as well as detected absence. It was also calculated to promote the interests of the superiors, by periodically reminding their dependants of their duty to God, which necessarily involves every human obligation.

WE come now to speak, though cursorily, of another deposit of talent, not less ex-

tensive in its immediate effects, and far more important in its consequences; the influence of Genius and Learning. As the influence of well-directed talents is too obvious to require animadversion, we shall confine our brief remarks to their contrary direction. If we could suppose the man whose talents had, by pernicious principles, been diverted from their right channel, to have, at the close of life, that clear view of his own character, and the misapplication of his mental powers, which will be presented to him when he opens his eyes on eternity, we should witness as complete a contrast with his present feelings as any two opposite descriptions of character could exhibit.

Of all the various sentences to be awarded at the dread tribunal, can imagination figure one more severe than will be pronounced against the polluted and polluting wit; the noblest faculties turned into arms against him who gave them, the eloquence which would scarcely have disparaged the tongue of angels, converted to the rhetoric of hell?

The mischief of a corrupt book is indefinite, both in extent and duration. When the personal example of the writer has done its worst, and has only ruined his friends and neighbours, the operation of an unprincipled work may be but just beginning. It is a sin, the commission of which carries in it more of the character of its infernal inspirer than any other. It is a crime not prompted by appetite, kindled by passion, or provoked by temptation; but a gratuitous, voluntary, cold-blooded enormity, the offspring of intellectual wickedness, the child of spiritual depravity; the deepest sin without the slightest excuse. Sins of surprise have infirmity to plead, but, in this frigid villainy, the badness of the motive keeps pace with the turpitude of the act. The *intention* is to offend God, the *project* is to ruin man; the *aim* is to poison the temporal peace, the *design* is to murder the everlasting hope of all who come in contact with it.

But the exclusive application of talents to subjects perfectly unexceptionable, and right and valuable, as far as they go, is sometimes
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an occasion in which we might mingle regret with admiration. We view with reverence the profound scholar, a man, so far from having lost any time in trifling, whose very amusements are labours, and whose relaxation is intensity of thought, and sedulity of study. By unremitting diligence, he has been daily adding fresh stores to his ponderous mass of erudition, or periodically presenting new tomes to the literary world, in return for those he has rifled. But, put the case, that such a man has never so much as conceived the thought of lending to religion his weight of character, or the influence of his reputation, by devoting some little interval to a moral or religious speculation, or has never once entertained the idea of directing his treasures of learning, into any channel which leads to the country where he and his volumes together, the durable register of his life, are soon about to land,—Who can forbear, in the contemplation of such a possible character, regretting that his too moderate ambition should be satisfied with the applause of an age or
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an island, without once exercising his talents on some topic which might have included the concerns of his whole species, which might have embraced the interests of both worlds? Who can forbear lamenting, that he has risen so high without reflecting that, in a moral sense, "one step higher would set him highest;" that he should have been contented with the idolatrous worship of some Pagan sage as editor or annotator; and, for that humble meed, to relinquish the duty of glorifying his Maker, by instructing his fellow-creatures; as if that were a less splendid object, an inferior concern to be turned over to inferior abilities, and to which inferior abilities were adequate.

If the awful apprehension of a future account could, at the close of life, lead even the illustrious Grotius, who had with equal ability cultivated both secular and sacred studies, to wish that he could change characters with a poor pious peasant, who used to spend most of his time in reading the Bible at his gate, what may finally be the wish of those who, having quitted a far less useful life with-

out any such contrite confession, are brought to *witness* at once the retribution assigned to the conscientious use of one solitary talent, and to *feel* that awarded to their own vast but abused allotment? That awakening parable of the Divine Teacher which presents so terrible a view of the "great gulf" which irrevocably separated two other neighbours, whose respective lots in worldly circumstances resembled the distinctions of intellect in the preceding instance — that "gulf" which eternally divided the holy beggar from the opulent sensualist — is equally applicable to the present case. If any thing could deepen or widen a barrier already hopelessly impassable, might it not be the substitution of ill-applied abilities for misemployed riches.*

An affecting thought involuntarily forces itself upon us, on the departure of distinguished genius. All those shining talents which had hitherto too exclusively filled our minds,

* Let no one apply this to the great statesman of Holland.

sink at once in our estimation, because we know they are now nothing to their possessor but as they were used, worse than nothing if they were not used wisely. In the court where he now stands for trial, neither the cogent argument nor the pointed wit can secure his acquittal; happy if they appear not strong evidences against it. The qualities of his heart, which perhaps, dazzled by those of his head, we had not taken into the account — his errors having been lost in his brightness — now come forward as the others recede. Our feelings are solely occupied with what may be now available to him to whom we have owed pleasure or information. That fame which we lately thought so solid a good, seems now a painted cloud melting into air — that proud FOR EVER for which he wrote, seems dwindled to a point — that visionary immortality which we had assigned as his meed, compared with the eternity on which he has entered, is become less than the shadow to the substance, less than the halo to the sun.

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This idea strikes the mind with peculiar force, upon the recent decease of two writers of uncommon reach of thought, profound research, and unbounded philological learning. Had these two eminent men been possessed of inferior minds, or a more dubious fame, their death would have founded the signal of silence, no less to the moralist than to the satyrist, as to the gross sensuality and corrupt principles of the one, the avowed atheism and profligate political doctrines of the other. As it is, we cannot but refer to them, though with feelings of pungent regret, and only under a strong sense of the atonement which such examples owe to the world for the mischief they do it, as a melancholy illustration of some of the preceding remarks. It is to be feared that the unmixed commendation of their talents and erudition, without the gentlest censure of their principles and practices, with which some of our journals abounded on the loss of these able but unhappy men, might tend to impress the ardent youthful student with
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an over-valuation of genius, un sanctified by Christian principles, of erudition undignified by virtuous conduct.

Far, very far, from my heart be the ungenerous thought of treating departed eminence with disrespect, but in analysing striking characters is it not a duty to separate "the precious from the vile," lest unqualified commendation, where there is such large room for censure, should, while profusely embalming the dead, allure the ingenuous living to an imitation as unlimited, as the panegyric was undistinguishing?*

* To prevent any mistaken application of these remarks, it may be proper to avow that Professor Porson and Mr. Horne Tooke are the persons to whom they allude.

CHAP. VII.

On Time, considered as a Talent.

IF we already begin to feel what a large portion of life we have improvidently squandered — what days and nights have been suffered to waste themselves, if not criminally, yet inconsiderately ; if not loaded with evil, yet destitute of good — how much time has been consumed in worthless employments, frivolous amusements, listless indolence, idle reading, and vain imaginations — if things already begin to appear wrong, which we once thought at least harmless, though not perhaps useful — what appearance will they assume in that inevitable hour when all things will be seen in their true light, and appreciated according to their intrinsic value ? We shall then feel in its full force how often we neglected what we knew to be our duty, shunned what we were aware

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was our interest, and declined what we yet believed would add to our happiness ; while, with perverted energy, we eagerly pursued what we had reason to think was contrary to our interest, duty, and happiness. But excuses satisfy us now, to which we shall not then give the hearing for a moment. The thin disguise which the illusion of the senses now casts over vanity, sloth, and error, will then be as little efficient as consolatory.

He who carefully governs his mind will conscientiously regulate his time. To him who thus accurately distributes it, 'who appropriates the hour to its due employment, life will never seem tedious, yet counted by this moral arithmetic it will be really long. If we compute our time as critically as our other possessions ; if we assign its proportions to its duties, though the divisions will then be so fully occupied that they will never drag, yet the aggregate sum will be found sufficiently long for all the purposes to which life is destined.

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It is not a little absurd that they who most wish to abolish time would be the least willing to abridge life. But is it not unreasonable to endeavour to annihilate the parcels of which life is composed, and at the same time to have a dread of shrinking the stock? They who most pathetically lament the want of time are either persons who plunge themselves into unnecessary concerns, or those who manage them ill, or those who do nothing. The first create the deficiency they deplore; the second do not so much want time as arrangement; the last, like brute animals laden with gold, groan under the weight of a treasure of which they make no use, and do not know the value.

They will never make a right use of time who turn it over to chance, who live without any definite scheme for its employment, or any fixed object for its end. Such desultory beings will be carried away by every trifle that strikes the senses, or any whim that seizes the imagination. They who live without any ultimate point in view, can have
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no regular process in the steps which lead to it.

But though in order to prevent confusion, to animate torpor, and to tame irregularity, it is always a duty to form a plan, occasions will arise when it may be a higher duty to break it. Both ourselves and our plans must ever be kept subject to the will of a higher power. That is an ill-regulated mind which wears life away without any settled scheme of action; that is a little mind which makes itself a slave to any pre-conceived rule, when a more imperative duty may arise to demand its infraction. Providence may call us to some work during the day which we did not foresee in the morning. Even a good design must be relinquished to make way for a better, nor must we sacrifice a useful to a favourite project, nor must we scruple to renounce our inclinations at the call of duty, or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful doer as well as a "cheerful giver."

In our use of time we frequently practise a delusion which cheats us of no inconsiderable

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able portion of its actual enjoyment. The *now* escapes us while we are settling future points not only of business, of ease, or of pleasure, but of benevolence, of generosity, of piety. These imaginary points to which we impatiently stretch forward in idea, we fix at successive but distant intervals, endeavouring by the rapid march of a hurrying imagination to annihilate the intervening spaces. One great evil of reckoning too absolutely on marked periods which may never arrive, is, that, by this absorption of the mind, we neglect present duties in the anticipation of events, not only remote but uncertain. Even if the anticipated period does arrive, it is not always applied to the purpose to which it was pledged; and the event which was to feel the full weight of our interference and commanding influence, when it has taken place, sinks into the undistinguished mass of time and circumstances. The point which we once thought, if it ever could be attained, would supply abundant matter, not only for present duty or pleasure,
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but for delightful retrospection, loses itself, as we mingle with it, in the common heap of forgotten things; and as we recede from it, merges in the dim obscure of faded recollections. Having arrived at the era, instead of seizing on that *present* so impatiently desired while it was *future*, we again send our imaginations out to fresh distances in search of fresh deceits. While we are pushing it on to objects still more remote, the large uncalculated spaces of comfort and peace, or of languor and discontent, which fill the chasm, and which we scarcely think worth taking into the account, make up far the greater part of life.

All this would be only foolish, and would hardly deserve a harsher name, if these large uncultivated wastes, these barren interstices, these neglected subdivisions, had not all of them imperious demands of their own — if they were not to be as rigorously accounted for, as the vivid spots and shining prospects which promise so much and produce so little.

Let us not then compute time by particular periods or signal events. Let us not content ourselves with putting our festal days only into the calendar, but remember that from the hour when reason begins to operate, to the hour in which it shall be extinguished, every particle of time is valuable: that no day can be insignificant, when every day is to be accounted for; that each one possesses weight and importance, because of each the retribution is to be received. In the prospect therefore of our coming time, let us not make great leaps from the expectation to the occurrence; but bearing in mind that small concerns make up the larger share of life, let us aim to execute well those which lie more immediately before us. For the instant occasion we have life and time in hand, for that which is prospective, we may no longer be in possession of either: and it is an argument of no small cogency, that he who devotes time to its best purposes, secures eternity for its best enjoyments.

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But we are guilty of the strange inconsistency of being most prodigal of what we best love, and of throwing away what we most fear to lose, that time of which life is made up. If God does not give us a short time, we can contrive to make it short by this wretched husbandry. It is not so much indigence of time as prodigality in the waste of it, that prevents life from answering all the ends for which it is given. Few things make us so independent of the world as the prudent disposition of this precious article. It delivers people from hanging on the charity of others to emancipate them from the slavery of their own company. We should not only be careful not to waste our own time, but that others do not rob us of it. The distinction of crime between "stealing our purse" and "stealing our good name" has been beautifully contrasted. That the purse is "trash" is a sentiment echoed by many who yet set no small value on the trash so liberally condemned; while the waster of his own, or the pilferer of another's time,

escapes a censure which he ought more heavily to incur. It is a felony for which no repentance can make restitution, the commodity being not only invaluable but irrecoverable.

Considerable evil, with respect to the economy of time, arises from an error which infects some minds of a superior cast — a notion that contempt of order and custom are indications of genius, that great minds cannot be tied to times, nor enslaved by seasons. They value themselves on being systematic only in their disdain of method, on being regular in nothing but irregularity; with them accident gives the law to action. They pride themselves not in dispatching business but postponing it, and this in order to shew with what ability they can retrieve time to which they are always in arrears. From this vanity of intimating that they can execute in hours what costs slower souls days or weeks, the most pressing business is deferred to some indefinite period, and duties thus postponed are not seldom omitted.

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The same confidence in his own powers which leads a young man of genius to believe he can catch knowledge by intuition, see every thing at a glance, and comprehend every thing in a moment, tempts him to put off that moment. But if such wonders are really to be achieved without the old ingredients time and study, what might he not expect would be accomplished with their assistance? Those who are now marvels would then be miracles! The too common consequence of this impatience of application, is to affect to despise whatever knowledge requires time to attain, and to consider whatever demands industry to acquire, as not worth acquiring.

Nor is this error monopolized by talents. We have known some, who, having no other evidence of genius to produce, never failed to be unpunctual. It is a wonder that the more intellectual, seeing their province thus invaded by dunces, do not become regular through mere contempt of their imitators, and abandon the abuse of

time to those who know not how to spend it wisely.

Christianity is a social principle. He who has discovered the use of time, and consequently the value of eternity, cannot but be solicitous for the spiritual good of his fellow-creatures. The one, indeed, is indicative of the other. But this good, like every other, is not without its dangers. We cannot essentially benefit people without associating with them, without rendering ourselves agreeable to them. But in so doing we should ever recollect that we may seek to please till we forget to serve them, we may soften strong truths to render them more palatable till we come gradually less to recommend *them*, than ourselves. In the spirit of friendly accommodation we may insensibly lower the standard of religion, with a view to make ourselves more agreeable, and may deceive, in order to conciliate.

Or we may fall into another error. We may begin at the wrong end. We may censure
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sure the wrong practice without any reference to the principle, or we may suit our counsels, not to the wants, but to the taste, of our friend. In our endeavours to promote the good of others, we should be careful to find out the points in which they are most deficient. If their error be ignorance of Scripture, if worldliness, if prejudice, if a general disinclination to seriousness, if a blind respect for religion, joined to an unacquaintedness with its doctrines; in each case, a very different mode of conduct will be requisite. In each, in all, we should, indeed, with the utmost fairness, lay open the whole scheme of Christianity, neither concealing its difficulties, its humbling requisitions, nor the self-denials it imposes. But, at the same time, if we suspect any one truth to be particularly revolting to them, it will be more prudent to approach this truth gradually through others, from which they are less averse, than, by forcing its introduction at the outset, shut up the way to farther progress. Every doctrine should be unfolded

gradually, judiciously, temperately, not insisting on any points that are not clearly Scriptural, nor on any that admit of doubtful disputation, nor on many points at a time; and, above all, on none unseasonably, or unceasingly.

This habit of turning time to account, by endeavouring to be useful to others, will, if conducted with mildness, and exercised with Christian humility, be eminently beneficial to ourselves. It will set us on a closer examination of the truths we suggest; and, in contending with blindness and self-sufficiency, we shall find a wholesome exercise for our own patience and moderation. It may remind us, that we were once, perhaps, in the same state. Above all, it will put us on a more strict watchfulness over our own hearts and lives, lest we should be adopting one set of principles for our conversation, and another for our conduct. It will induce the necessity of a more exact consistency, as they, to whom we are counsellors,
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will not be backward, if we furnish them with the least ground, to be our censurers.

And here I would affectionately suggest to my numerous amiable young friends, the benefit to be derived to their own minds from the personal instruction of the poor, for which so wide a field is just now providentially opened. In communicating the elements of religious knowledge—in numberless repetitions of the same plain truths—in being obliged to begin again the simple document which they fancied they had long ago impressed—in the humbling necessity of lowering their ideas, and debasing their language, in order to make themselves intelligible—in the forbearance which dullness of intellect, perverseness of temper, and ingratitude demand, they may gain some proficiency themselves, even where their success with others is least encouraging.

But to whatever account we turn our time with respect to others, the first object of its right employment is with ourselves;

and this not only in discharging those exercises of piety and virtue, which are too obvious and too generally acknowledged, to require to be specified; but, in attending to the secret dispositions of the mind, in order to ascertain its real character. We do not mean to imply that we can judge of its state by the thoughts which are necessarily suggested by any actual business, or any pressing object, such thoughts being the proper demand of the occasion, and not any certain indication of our abiding state and habitual temper. But, by watching the nature and tendency of our spontaneous thoughts, we may, in a great measure, determine on the character of our minds; their voluntary thoughts and unprompted feelings, being the streams which indicate the fountain whence they flow. The heart is that perennial spring; for, whether grace or nature supply the current, the fountain is inexhaustible. In either case, the more abundantly it flows, the more constantly its waste is fed by fresh supplies; expence, in-

stead of exhausting, augments the stream whether the source from earth supply worldly thoughts, or that from above such as are heavenly. Thoughts determine on the character: *as the man thinketh, so is he.*

What a scene will open upon us, when, from our eternal state, we shall look back on the use we have made of time! What a revolution will be wrought in our opinions! What a contrast will be exhibited, when we shall take a clear retrospect of all we have done, and all we ought to have done! And shall we then put off the inspection to an uncertain period, to a period, when we can neither repent to any purpose for what was wrong, nor begin to do what we shall then perceive would have been right? Let these frequent meditations on death, lead us to reflect what the feelings of a dying-bed will be. Let us think now what will then be the review of riches mis-spent, of talents neglected or perverted, of influence abused, of learning misapplied, of time mis-employed! To entertain serious thoughts

of death now, is the most likely method for rectifying tempers, for conquering propensities, for establishing principles, for confirming habits, of which we shall then feel the consequences; for relinquishing enterprises and pursuits, for the success of which we may then be as much afflicted, as we should now be at their defeat.

He who cannot find time to consult his Bible, will find, one day, that he has time to be sick; he who has no time to pray, must find time to die. He who can find no time to reflect, is most likely to find time to sin; he who cannot find time for repentance, will find an eternity in which repentance will be of no avail. Let us, then, under the influence of the Divine spirit, seriously reflect, under what law we came into the world: "it is appointed for all men once to *die*, and, after death, the JUDGEMENT." Is it not obvious, then, that the design of life is to prepare for judgment; and that, in proportion as we employ time well, we make immortality happy?

CHAP. VIII.

Charity.

IN that general use of the Talents, suggested in the parable, there is also a particular vocation, on the exercise of which, every man must equitably determine. Each is particularly called upon to acquit himself of that more immediate duty, for the practice of which, God has given special endowments and opportunity. Our Maker requires the specific exercise of the specific talent. The nature of the gift points out the nature of the requisition. The use of the endowment is a peculiar debt, a marked obligation. This is not a gift confounded with the mass of his gifts, but one by which God designs to be, by that individual, more remarkably glorified.

But *charity* is a virtue of all times and all places. It is not so much an independent
 grace

grace in itself, as an energy, which gives the last touch and highest finish to every other, and resolves them all into one common principle. It is called "the very bond of perfectness," not only because it unites us to God, our ultimate perfection, but because it ties all the other virtues together, and refers them thus concatenated, to Him, their common source and centre.

St. Peter having given a pressing exhortation to many exalted duties, finishes by ascribing to charity this emphatical superiority; "*Above all things, have fervent charity.*" It is, indeed, the prolific principle of all duty: a confluence of every thing that is lovely and amiable: the fountain from which all excellencies flow, the stream in which they all meet. It is not subject to the ebb and flow of passion or partiality — it is true Christian sympathy. It is tender without weakness; it does not arise from that constitutional softness which may be rather infirmity than virtue. It is the affection of the Gospel; a love derived from the Spirit of
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of Christ, and reciprocally communicated among his genuine followers.

Charity comprehends an indefinitely wide sphere, both in feeling and doing. According to the arrangement of St. Paul, in his beautiful personification of this grace *, she may be said to embrace almost the whole scheme of religious, personal, and social duty. "Patient and kind," she does not wait to be solicited to acts of benignity, she seizes the occasion — she does more, she watches for it. She "endures" evils, but inflicts none; she does not select her trials, but "bears all things." Though "she believes all things," yet she exercises her hope without relinquishing her prudence; sometimes, where conviction forbids her thinking favourably, even then it does not prevent "her hoping all things." She subdues "vaunting," conquers the swellings of insolence, and the untractableness of pride. Not only "she envieth not," not only she disallows the injustice of desiring

* Corinthians, chap. xiii.

what is another's, but, by a noble disdain of selfishness, she even "seeketh not her own." Her disinterestedness stirs her up to the perpetual rooting out that principle wrought by nature into the constitution of the soul. So far from thinking it a proof of spirit to resent injuries, she is not "easily provoked" by them. She smooths the fierceness of the irascible, and corrects the acrimony of the evil-tempered. She not only does not perpetrate, but "she thinketh no evil." She has found a shorter way of becoming rich than avarice ever invented, for charity makes another's goods her own by a simple process; without dispossessing the proprietor, she rejoices so much in another's prosperity that it becomes hers, because it is his.

Here we see that the Apostle places charity not only before all the virtues which he thus gracefully marshals, before qualities the most moral, gifts the most spiritual, attainments the most intellectual, but he actually degrades these last in the comparison; he

does not barely lower their value, he annihilates it. Without this principle of life, this soul of duty, this essence of goodness, they are not only little, they are nothing. Without charity, possessions, talents, exertions, are all fruitless. They are of no value in the sight of God : they are of no efficacy to our salvation. Charity alone sanctifies our offerings, recommends our prayers, and makes our very praises acceptable.

And though nothing is formally efficacious but the blood and merits of Christ, yet charity, as a divine grace, and one that will never cease, shews that our interest on him, and union with him, are real and genuine.

But to descend to particulars, and apply them to the common purposes of life.—Whenever we are promoting the good of mankind, either by assisting public institutions, or relieving individuals, we are obviously helping on the cause of charity ; and, when we cannot effectively assist the work, we may exercise the principle ; we may pray
for

for the happiness which we cannot confer, and rejoice in every addition to the general good towards which we cannot contribute. On the other hand, the purse may sometimes be open where the heart is shut. And it is perhaps a more rare and a higher virtue to exercise forbearance towards the faults, and to put a candid construction on the actions, of others, than to supply their wants, or promote their temporal interests. But whether candour in judging, or liberality in giving, be the virtue in exercise, by the adoption of each as a law, and the practice of both on the ground of conformity to the Divine will, we shall acquire such a habit of exercising the kind affections, that what was adopted as a principle will be established into a pleasure; what was a force upon nature, will almost grow into a part of it; obligation will become choice, law impulse, duty necessity; the energy will become so powerful, that the heart will involuntarily spring to the performance; indolence, selfishness, trouble, inconvenience, will
vanish

vanish under the vigorous operation of a habit whose motive is genuine Christianity.

One Christian grace is never exercised at the expence of another, nor is it perfect, unless it promotes that other. Thus charity enjoys abstinently that she may give liberally. While she restrains every wrong inclination, she stimulates as to such as are right. She is never a solitary quality, but is inseparably linked with truth and equity. She leads us perpetually to examine our means, dispositions, and opportunities, and to exert their combined force for the promotion of the greatest possible good. She teaches us to contribute to the comfort of others as well as to their necessities. She converts small kindnesses into great ones, by doing them with reference to God; for it is not so much the worth, as the temper, which will render them acceptable to Him.

We must not judge of our charity by single acts and particular instances, for they are not always good men who do good things, but by our general tendencies and propen-

propensities. We must strive after an uniformity in our charity — examine whether it be equable, steady, voluntary, and not a charity of times, and seasons, and humours. If we are as unkind and illiberal in one instance as we are profuse in another, when the demand is equal, and we have both the choice and the means, whatever we may be, we are not charitable.

Though charity, as we have already observed, is a quality of universal application, and by no means limited within the narrow bounds of alms-giving, yet, not to allow a due, that is, a high rank and station to those works of benevolence, to which our Redeemer gives so conspicuous a place in his exhibition of the scrutiny at the general judgment, would be mistaking the genius of Christianity, would be departing from the practice and the principles of its Founder; it would be forgetting the high dignity he conferred on this grace, when he declared that he should consider the meanest work of
love

love done to the least of his followers for his sake as done to himself.

This pecuniary charity is not to be limited to our particular connections—must not be confined to unfounded attachments, to party-favourites. It must be governed by the law of justice. We must not do a little good to one which may involve a greater injury to another: yet, though we should keep our hearts always open, and our feelings alive to the general benefit, still, as our power must be inevitably contracted, whatever right others may have to our beneficence, local circumstances, natural expectations, and pressing necessity, confer the more immediate claim. The *most* immediate is that of the household of faith.

From hence it appears, that in enquiring into the duties of charity, we must not overlook the use to be made of riches, one of the talents implied in the parable. The application of money, whether “kept by their owners to their hurt,” or squandered to their destruction, will equally be made
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the subject of final investigation. Lord Bacon's remark, that "riches, when kept in a heap, are corrupt like a dunghill, but, when spread abroad, diffuse beauty and fertility," has been more admired than acted upon. All the fine sentences that have been pelted at the head of covetousness have probably never reformed one miser; nor have the most pointed aphorisms, not divinely directed, ever taught the luxurious the true use of money. Happily the age in which we live is so generally disposed to acts of beneficence, that there never was a period which less imposed the necessity to press the duty, to enforce the practice, or to point out the objects. A thousand new channels are opened, yet the old ones are not dried up; the streams flow in abundance, as if fed by a perennial fountain.

Let not any one, however, intrench himself in the supposed security of surrounding goodness. Let not any take comfort that he lives in an age of charity, if he himself is not charitable. We are not benevolent by contact

contact or infection, or by breathing an atmosphere of charity. Yet who has not heard persons exultingly boast of this noble characteristic of the age, who are by no means remarkable for contributing their own contingent towards establishing its character? Doubtless, many a man gloried in the valour of his country, and exulted in the pride of being an Englishman, after the battles of Trafalgar and Salamanca, who, had he been sent into the action, would have been shot for cowardice.

Who has not seen the ready eye discharge its kindly showers at a tale of woe, and the frugal sentimentalist comfort himself that his tears had paid more cheaply the debt of benevolence, for which his purse had been solicited. The Author, many years ago, made one in a party of friends; an expected guest, who was rather late, at length came in; she was in great agitation, having been detained on the road by a dreadful fire in the neighbourhood. The poor family, who were gone to bed, had been with difficulty

ficulty awakened. The mother had escaped by throwing herself from a two pair of stairs window into the street. She then recollected, that, in her extreme terror, she had left her child behind in bed. To the astonishment of all present, she instantly rushed back through the flames, and, to the general joy, soon appeared with the child alive in her arms. While she was expressing her gratitude, the light of the lamps fell on its face, and she perceived, to her inexpressible horror, that she had saved the child of another woman — her own had perished. It may be imagined what were the feelings of the company. A subscription was instantly begun. Almost every one had liberally contributed, when a Nobleman, who could have bought the whole party, turning to the writer of these pages said, “Madam, I will give you —” every expecting eye was turned to the Peer, knowing him to be unused to the giving mood; the person addressed joyfully held out her hand, but drew it back on his coolly saying, “I will give you this
affecting

affecting incident for the subject of your next tragedy." Some will read this passage who were present on the occasion.

But since neither the logic nor the rhetoric of the writer, were she so happy as to possess either, is likely to make the "churl liberal," or to stir up the vain or the voluptuous to a beneficence which shall bear any fair proportion to the costly maintenance of their luxury or their vanity, the slight observations which follow shall be addressed to the bountiful giver, a character, blessed be God, as common as it is amiable. To the act it is unnecessary to excite him; to the motive he cannot too carefully look. This is the more requisite, as, in an age in which more excellent charity sermons are annually preached than ever were delivered since the establishment of Christianity — that, which alone of all the religions in the world, ever made charitable foundations a part of its institution — we now and then meet with one, which seems to invert the principle, and to put the point for the base. It is with dif-

fidence we put the question, dreading to be suspected of indulging a spirit of censure where we would wish to offer unqualified commendation; but do we not now and then hear assigned to almsgiving, nay assigned to the individual contribution for which the well-intentioned preacher is eloquently pleading, a merit so vast, that it would seem to supply the absence of all other merits; a merit which would almost induce one to believe that a more than ordinary contribution to the plate would prove a golden key, to stand in *his* stead, who “has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers?”

To explain my meaning by an example:—In the Temple of *Him* who gave his son to die, to atone for the sins of the world, I once heard, and from no mean authority, Charity called *the atoning virtue of the age*. To have termed it the prevailing, the distinguishing, the most amiable characteristic of the age, had been right and true. But when I found it thus gravely proposed as an expiation for sin, I was ready to imagine that

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I heard the exclamation of St. Paul to his Galatians — “ I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto the grace of Christ unto another Gospel.”

We most readily not only allow for, but admire, the ardour of an animated preacher who, feeling his heart expand with his subject, finds it as much his delight, as his duty, to impart to every bosom the tender and compassionate sympathies with which his own overflows; and it is with reluctance we have presumed to intimate the restraints, which Christian piety should impose on itself in not overstating even a Christian duty.

We have no right to determine on the proportions and possibilities of any man's charity, but on the principle we may determine; there must be an exhaustless spring in the heart, even where the Christian's means will not admit of a perpetual current. Love is in fact that motive, without which neither faith, nor mysteries, nor martyrdom, no nor even the addition of the second guinea to the plate, where only one had been in-

tended, nor giving all our goods to the poor, will profit any thing. Where this vital spirit is wanting the most ample bounty will not reach its end; where it exists, "the cup of cold water" shall be accepted. Without this animating principle, though the bounty may obtain applause, may influence others, may do good, and promote good, yet it may unhappily fall short of promoting the spiritual interests of the giver. He who has promised to render to every man according to his deeds, knows the principle of the deed, and has never promised to recompence any which has no reference to himself.

To neglect works of charity, not to be largely liberal in the performance of them according to our ability, is an infallible evidence that our professions of piety mean nothing. On the other hand, to depend upon them as what is to bear us out in our claims for heaven, before the tribunal of God, is to offend our Maker and deceive our own souls. We would be the very last
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to undervalue, or to discourage charity, but is it discouraging it to place it on its true ground; to assert that we may build an hospital without charity, as we may endow a church without piety, if we consider the one as an expiation for sin, or the other as a substitution for holiness?

Some are ingenious in contriving, by a strange self-delusion, to swell the amount of their charity, by tacking to it extraneous items of a totally distinct character. The Author was formerly acquainted with a lady of rank, who, though her benevolence was suspected to bear no proportion to the splendor of her establishment, was yet rather too apt to make her bounties a subject of conversation. After enumerating the various instances of her beneficence, she often concluded by saying, “ notwithstanding my large family I give all this in charity *besides paying the poor rates* ;” thus converting a compulsory act, to which all are equally subject, into a voluntary bounty.

Our corruptions are so liable to infect even our "holy things," that we should be vigilant in this best exercise of the best affections of the heart — affections which God, when he graciously converted a duty into a delight, gave us, in order by a pleasurable feeling, to stir us up to compassion. We should be careful that the great enemy may not be plotting our injury, even when we are performing actions the most hostile to his interests.

As there is not a more lovely virtue in the whole Christian code, so there is not one which more imperatively demands our attention to the spirit with which we exercise it, and the temper with which we bear the disappointment sometimes attending our best intended bounties. Though charity is too frequently thrown away on those who receive it, it is never lost on the benefactor, if "he who gives, does it with simplicity." When the bountiful giver cannot find pleasure, he may always
extract

extract good. He may reap no small advantage himself from that liberality which has failed to confer any. He may gain benefit from the disappointment he experiences in the unworthiness of the object. When the project he had anxiously formed for doing good to another is defeated by perverseness, or requited by ingratitude, it not only does not check the spring of bounty in the real Christian, but it calls new virtues into action. The exercise of patience, an improvement in forbearance and forgiveness, a stronger conviction that we must not make the worthiness of the object the sole measure of our bounty, are well worth the money we have spent on the undeserving. Perhaps too the reiterated instances how little good the best man is able to do in this world, may serve to wean him from it, and be an additional inducement for looking forward to a better.

But it is much easier to relieve our neighbour's wants, than to bear with his errors; the one gratifies our natural feelings, while

the other offends them; the most difficult as well as the most sublime branch of charity therefore, is the forgiveness of injuries, is the love of our enemies. It is a love humbly aiming to resemble his, who sends his rain on the just and on the unjust; a love not inspired by partiality, not extorted by merit. It is following the example, while we obey the precept of Christ, when we "do good to them that hate us." It is a charity which bursts with a generous disdain the narrow bounds of attachment and even of desert, levels every fence which selfish prudence would erect between itself and its enemies; it is a love, with respect to the objects, though with a boundless disproportion as to the measure, resembling God's love to us; it aims to be universal in kind, though it is low in the degree.

A very able divine * has insisted that it is to this part of the character of the Almighty that our Saviour limits the injunction,

* See Bishop Sherlock's sermon on the text, "Be ye perfect," &c. &c.

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“ Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” It is, indeed, one of the principal instances in which finite creatures can by imitation approximate to the character of God; most of his attributes rather requiring us to adore, than leaving it possible for us to imitate them. For though all the attributes of God afford the most exalted idea of complete perfection, yet the injunction to attain his image is strikingly applied in the New Testament to this particular part of the divine character. The Apostle applies our being “ followers of God, as dear children” afterwards to this individual instance, “ forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you,” adding, “ and walk in love as Christ also loved us.” “ So that,” says the Bishop, “ his exhortation to follow God stands inclosed on both sides with the precepts of love and charity, as if he intended to secure it from being applied to any thing else.” St. Luke, who gives us an abridgment of the same sermon on the mount from which

the passage is taken, also suggests the practice of love and forgiveness from the example of the Almighty, "who is kind to the unthankful and the evil." After having delivered the same beatitude, he corroborates the interpretation with an injunction, by saying, not be *perfect*, but "be merciful as your Father also is merciful."

Our Saviour impressed a solemn emphasis on the command to forgive the offences of others, when he implicated it with God's forgiveness of us. It is to be feared, that many who would think it an act of disobedience to omit the daily repetition of the divine prayer, of which this request forms so striking a clause, do not lay to heart the daily duty of supplicating for that frame of spirit which the petition involves. Can there be a more awful consideration, than that we put the grand request on which our eternal happiness depends, on this issue, when we inseparably associate our own hope of pardon, with the required and reasonable condition

condition of pardoning others? Should we not be conscientiously cautious, how we put up this petition, when we reflect, that we offer it to the great Searcher of hearts, who, while he listens to the request, can exactly determine on the integrity which accompanies it? The divine Author of the prayer seems to hold out a sort of test of the spirit of our obedience, when he proposes this difficult duty, as a trial of our general conformity to his commands. It seems selected by infinite wisdom as a kind of pledge of our submission to his will in all other points: our interest is confederate with our duty in the practice of this high and peculiarly Christian grace. The requisition suggests at once the most absolute obligation, and the most powerful motive.

This forgiveness seems not only to be one of the grand distinctions between the religion of the Heathen and the Christian world, but to form a considerable difference between the duties inculcated in the Old and the New Testament. In the former,

indeed, there were not only indications and suggestions of this rule, but some exemplifications of its actual performance. It is remarkable, that when David, whose energy of character, or rather mysterious inspiration as a prophet, led him to be so vehement in his denunciations of vengeance on persons of professed enmity against God, and against himself as the anointed of God, yet exhibited eminent instances of placability in his conduct towards his own personal enemies, especially in the case of Saul. But, perhaps, the duty, after all, was not so fully made out, so clearly defined, so positively enjoined,, nor was the frame of mind so evidently seen in "them of old time." We have many instances under that dispensation, of saints and prophets laying down their lives for their religion, but it was reserved for the first New Testament Martyr, when expiring under a shower of stones from his enemies, to say, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." The reason is obvious. It being expected, that our notions and practices

tices should be adapted to the revelation under which we live, this sublime species of charity should necessarily rise in proportion to the clearness and dignity of that dispensation. It is congruous, therefore, that our forgiveness of injuries should be exercised in far higher perfection under the Gospel, the professed object of which was to make a full and perfect revelation of the pardon of sin by the blood of a Redeemer. And we can only be said to have a conformity to his image, in proportion as we practise this grace. Let us, however, remember, to borrow the thought of an eminent divine, "that our forgiving others will not alone procure forgiveness for ourselves, while our not forgiving others is a plain proof, that we ourselves are not forgiven."

CHAP. X.

On Prejudice.

THERE is not a more curious subject of speculation, than to observe the variety of colours with which opinion tinges truth ; the bias which prejudice lends to facts, when it cannot deny them ; the perversion it gives to the motive, when it cannot invalidate the circumstance ; the warp and twist it gives to actions which it dares not openly condemn ; the disingenuousness into which it slides, even though it does not intend to maintain a falsehood ; the bright rays with which it gilds, perhaps unconsciously, its own side of a question ; the dark cloud by which it casts that of an adversary into shade.

Prejudice, if not altogether invincible, is, perhaps, the most difficult of all errors to be eradicated from the human mind. By disguising itself under the respectable name of firmness,

firmness, it is of infinitely slower extirpation than actual vice. For vice, though persisted in through the perverseness of the will, never sets itself up for virtue; a vicious man knows what is right, though his appetites deter him from following it; but a prejudice, being perhaps more frequently a fault of the judgment than of the heart, is sometimes persisted in upon principle. No man will defend a sin as such, but even good men defend a prejudice, though every one else sees that it is producing all the effect of a sin, promoting hatred, souring the temper, and exciting evil passions.

Yet, though it may incidentally be attached to a good man, there are few errors more calculated to estrange the heart from vital religion, because there are none under which men rest so satisfied. Under the practice of any immorality they are uneasy, and that uneasiness may lead to a cure; for the light of natural conscience is sufficiently strong to shew, that sin and peace cannot dwell together. But prejudice effectually
keeps

keeps a man from enquiring after truth, because he conceives that he is in full possession of it, and that he is following it up in the very error which keeps him so wide of it. Or if, with the Roman governor, he ask, "what *is* truth;" like him, he turns away for fear of an answer. The strongest light cannot penetrate eyes that are closed against it; while to the humble, who desire illumination, God gives not only the object, but the faculty of discerning it.

As it is mental, rather than moral prejudice, which is the present subject of consideration, we shall say little of those prejudices of which the passions and appetites are the cause. Interest and sensuality see the objects which absorb them through their own dense medium, while the vision of either is probably clear enough in judging of the objects of the other's passion; the blindness being partial, and confined, like the lunacy of some disordered patients, to the single object to which the disease has a reference.

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Even probity itself is not of sufficient force to guide our conduct ; we see men of sound integrity and of good judgment on subjects where prejudice does not intervene, acting, where it does, below the standard of ordinary men, governed by a name, carried away by a sound. It makes lovers of truth unjust, and converts wisdom into fatuity. It must, therefore, be an enlightened probity, or we may be injuring our fellow-creatures, when we persuade ourselves we are doing God service. Paul does not appear to have been a profligate, but to have been correct, zealous, and moral, and to have earned a high reputation among his own narrow and prejudiced sect. His error was in his judgment. The error of Peter was in his affections. A sudden touch of self-love in this vacillating, but warm-hearted disciple, made him dread to share in his Master's disgrace. But, in this case, a single penetrating glance melted his very soul, brought him back to contrition, repentance, and love. To cure the prejudices of Paul, a miracle was necessary. While the powerful arguments of
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of our Lord put even the Sadducees, the infidels of the day, "to silence," they produced no such effect on the professing Pharisees; instead of rejoicing to hear their great doctrine of the resurrection so fully vindicated, they redoubled their prejudices against him, at the very moment in which he had obtained such a triumph in their cause. The first thing they endeavoured, was to entangle, by their casuistry, him who had just defeated the common enemy.

But, let us judge even the prejudiced without prejudice. Prejudice, to a certain degree, is not so much the fault of the individual, as of our common nature. And that sober tincture of it, which is inseparable from habits and attachments, is a fair and honest prepossession: — for instance, Whoever reprobated, as a censurable prejudice, that generous feeling,

For which our Country is a name so dear?

But, after all, prejudice, of some kind or other, is a natural inborn error, attached to
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that blindness which is an incurable part of our constitution.

Disagreement of opinion, therefore, if it be an evil inseparable from our present state of being, ought not to excite antipathy; complete unanimity of heart and sentiment being reserved as part of the happiness of that more perfect state, where the effulgence of truth will dissipate all the error and misapprehension which cloud our judgment here.

People commonly intend to judge fairly; and, when they fail, it is as often an error of the understanding as of the heart. They form their opinion of some particular subject from what they see of it. But though they see only a part, they frequently form their opinion of that which remains unseen, more peremptorily than those who see the whole; for a large and clear view, by affording a justness of conception, commonly induces humility. Perhaps, on their ignorance of those very parts of a question which they do not see, they form their decision on
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the whole ; while the unseen points are precisely those which only could enable them to determine fairly on the general proposition.

We should not, however, very severely censure any for the mere opinion they form, this being a matter of the judgment rather than of the will ; the true object of censure is their conduct under this false impression ; in acting as hostilely as if their opinion was founded on the best ascertained facts. If we are all more or less prejudiced, it does not follow, that the conscientious act upon the feelings which the prejudice has excited. The harsh and the intolerant, indeed, let loose upon their adversaries all the bad passions which this disposition to prejudge opinions has stirred up ; while the mild spirit in which Christianity governs, will conduct itself with the same general kindness as if no diversity of opinion subsisted. Though all prepossession arises from some cloudiness in the mind, it is a fair trial of the Christian temper, when the man who suffers by it, continues to exercise the same tolerant and indulgent

indulgent spirit towards the prejudiced party, as if there were a mutual concurrence of sentiment. If he have no other ground of objection to the person from whom he differs, there is something of a large and liberal spirit in acting with him, and speaking of him, on other occasions, as if the matter in debate did not exist.

How endless and intricate are the misleadings of political prejudice! It is as detailed and minute in its operations, as it is broad and extensive in its compass. Will not the circumstance of voting on the same side often stand instead of the best qualities, in recommending one man to the good opinion of another? With this unfounded partiality is naturally connected a dislike to better men, on the mere ground of their taking the opposite side; for party, which takes such a large permission to think and act for itself, takes care never to allow to others the liberty which it so broadly and uniformly assumes.

He who drinks deep into the spirit of party, minutely pencils all the shades of mis-

representation ; his prejudice blackening, his partiality whitening ; the one deforming what is fair, the other beautifying what is foul ; the one defacing temples, the other garnishing sepulchres. Providence, in the meantime, working its own way by these perverse instruments ; the worst designers being sometimes surpris'd into doing more good than they intended, by a wish to anticipate the good projected by the opposite party, and so to throw an odium upon them, for not having been able to effect the same, though they had perhaps planned it, and though adverse circumstances alone had interrupted the scheme, or the want of a suitable occasion had delayed its accomplishment. Thus good is effected, the public is benefited, all are pleas'd. The conscientious rejoice that it is done at any rate ; the prejudic'd, that their party have the credit of doing it.

There are among the exhaustless manœuvres of a party-champion, if I may so speak, gestures and signs of disapprobation, which
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are of equal efficacy with language itself. There are also artifices in writing, that resemble intonation and accent in a skilful speaker, which, by a turn of the voice, or a clause in a parenthesis, throw in a shade of distinction, lend an emphasis which makes mystery intelligible, and helps out the apprehension of the reader. There is such a thing as an intellectual shrug of the shoulders, a mental shake of the head, an implication that has more meaning than an assertion, a hint which can effectually detract from the commendation which prudence had extorted, and which serves to awaken suspicion more than a direct charge. Whatever is omitted, is sure to be more than supplied; whatever is dexterously left open by the writer, never fails to be over-charged by the reader, who always values himself on his ingenuity in filling up an hiatus. There is a way of setting out with general praise, in order to make the meditated charge more effectual. A practised reader will see through the artful circumlocutory preface, which is gradually pre-

paring to introduce the little, though effectually disparaging particle *but*. These artifices raise up the ghost of some unknown evil in the character to be injured, and excite, at the same time, the idea of prudence and moderation in the censurer. It is a mysterious giving out, an assumed regret at being compelled to speak, a hypocritical conscientiousness, a reluctance of communication which, after it has told much more than all it knows, tenderly affects to have kept back the worst.

One evil which commonly arises from the perusal of a work of systematic opposition, whether the object be public or private, is, that it has a tendency to bias the more liberal reader, who took it up in the most impartial state of mind, with as undue a prejudice in favour of the party attacked, as the assailant laboured to establish in favour of his own; so that, if any injustice be excited, it is on the contrary side to that which the author intended. Generally speaking, however, people do not sit down
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with a pure design to read impartially any thing, which, from the title of the work, or the name of the author, they foresee or suspect is likely to contradict their creed, whether previously adopted from conviction or prepossession.

But, to confine our observations to the prejudices which embitter common life:—when we fancy we have been injured by some unfounded evil report, let us avoid considering the character of the reporter, or our own supposed injury, under the immediate impression of the intelligence, but try to divert our thoughts to some other subject, till our heated spirits have time to cool. We shall otherwise, too probably, feel and utter many things which exceed the bounds of strict justice. When the resentment has, in some measure, subsided, let us endeavour to collect and to retain only the simple and exact truth; what the enemy really said, and not what we suspected he might say. Let us retrench all that is imaginary, all that is merely suspicion; let us cut off all the

aggravations of conjecture, all the inventions of passion, all the additions of revenge, all that belongs to unsubstantiated report; — when these due retrenchments are made, we shall often see that the injury is not so great. It is no wonder if the object we saw through a mist was enlarged; a clear medium reduces it to its natural size.

But, supposing the worst to be true; religion, operating on experience, will at length teach us to set these metaphysical evils, these afflictions of the imagination, this anguish of wounded pride or irritated self-love, over against the real, deep, substantial miseries of body and mind, under which thousands of our fellow-creatures, nay many of our friends, are at the moment sinking; and we shall blush at our own irritability; we shall bless God for the lightness of our own lot; we shall even be thankful for that evil which exists only in the opinion, or the report of a fallible creature, and which makes no part of our real self.

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But, above all, let us never revenge the injury by opposing *our* injustice to that by which we suffer, by acting against our opponents with the same spirit with which we accuse them of acting against us. Retaliation, which is the justice of a vulgar mind, is of the very essence of an unchristian spirit. Where this is indulged, all the virtues of the adversary are rooted out by our resentment, and it is well, if we do not plant vices in their room. Or if we do not invent faults for them, are we not too much disposed to take comfort in those they have; to cherish unkind reports of them, to give them a welcome hearing and a wide circulation? Nay, self-estimation and rooted prejudice may lead us entirely to mistake the character of him we call our enemy. A man is not necessarily wicked because he does not admire us. He may dislike some of our notions without hating our persons; or, after all, his prejudices may not be entirely ill founded; and if we will examine ourselves on the ground of his charge in

some particular instance, we may find, that we have been wrong in a way which we might not have discovered without him. If his detection of our error lead us to correct it, we should not reckon that man among our worst enemies: or, if we should happen to be right, there is a great advantage in being assisted by the mode of attack, to know how to collect materials for our defence.

We must also learn sometimes to endure censure for things right in themselves, and, under existing circumstances, necessary, which yet may not appear right to others, because it may not be prudent to disclose those secret springs of action, which, if revealed, would convince others that we have not acted wrong. Instead of spending our spirits in invective, or spoiling our temper by hatred; instead of liking our faults the better, or adhering to them the more, because pointed out by those we dislike; would it not be wiser to enquire, if our opinions may not be prejudices, as well as theirs? For
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it does not inevitably follow, that even the dislike of bad men is any certain proof of our goodness; though our natural propensity to think our own conduct and opinions right, disposes us to think them more right in proportion to the opposition which is made to either. We are blind to our own singularities, even though those singularities may be errors; and a spirit of resentment or resistance makes that blindness often more obstinate. On the other hand, may we not be too much disposed to think our censurers, whom we call wicked, more wicked than they are; or, though there may be errors in their conduct, this does not take from them the capacity of judging of ours. Even though their hearts are wrong, their judgment, as far as relates to others, may not be totally perverted. It is no infallible proof of their bad judgment, that they think meanly of ours.

But allowing that their judgment is as incorrect as their practice, and that their dislike proceeds from the “strong antipathy

of bad to good," yet we may turn this dislike to profit. That hostility to religion, of which the Scripture so frequently speaks, is not intended to give the Christian a high notion of his own piety, but to encourage him against the fear and dejection which that hostility might create. If he meet with opposition, he must not fly for refuge to his own goodness, as contrasted with the faults of his opponents; nor must he be depressed, "as if some strange thing had happened to him;" much less must he convert the opposition he meets with, into an evidence, that he is in all instances right. In the consolations which the Gospel holds out to the sufferer for righteousness'-sake, it was intended to inspire him with courage, not vanity; with confidence in God, not in himself. He must not, therefore, so much value himself because he has enemies, as suspect that he may have enemies, because he has deserved them. Or perhaps, there is something wrong in us which we have not yet discovered, for which God permits us to have

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have enemies. This suspicion may serve to render us circumspect, and quicken our endeavours to remove the ground of their censure. This, even if it do not reconcile them to us, will still make us gainers by their enmity; so that, in any case, the Apostle's interrogation, "And who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" loses nothing of its force.

Who can forbear to lament, when he sees such a litigious spirit pervade superior minds, such airy nothings conjured into difficulties, sufficient to clog the wheels of the noblest undertakings; an effect resulting merely from the partiality with which even wise men sometimes cleave to their own prepossessions, added to a reluctance to examine what may possibly be wrong on their own side, or right on the other?

It would be comparatively a small evil, if prejudices were only fostered on occasions in which religion has no concern. If we could hope to see such a general proficiency in true piety, that, where the sentiments of

men concurred on all essential points, each side would sacrifice something on points that were indifferent, it would be a sort of realization of the communion of Saints. But if it be called an act of Omnipotence to "make men of one mind in a *house*," what would it be to make them of one mind in a town or a kingdom? If we could witness a cordial agreement between those who profess to have the interests of the same religion at heart, such a concurrence in the wish to promote its great practical objects, as would render them willing to concede their own theories, or their own judgment, in things that do not affect any of the vitals of religion, with such noble materials worked up into action, what a glorious world might this become! This combination of Christian feeling would extinguish all unkind debate, "all malice, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking." This peace-offering would oblige no one to renounce his principles; yet, by the extinction of petty differences, by such a confederacy of honest hearts and candid

candid spirits uniting for some great public object, this wilderness would almost be converted into the garden of God. Nor would an inferior portion of the benefit be derived to the minds of those by whom, for a cause of general importance, the inconsiderable sacrifice was made; so far from it, it would be hard to say which made up the largest aggregate of good, the private exercise of individual virtue, or the promotion of the general end. But, alas! do we not sometimes see Christians more forward in attacking and exposing each other, than in buckling on their arms to make war on the common enemy? Are they not more ready to wage that war against a pious brother, who does not view some one opinion exactly in the same light with themselves, though equally zealous in the promotion of general truth, than against those who have no religion at all? What a church triumphant would our's be in one sense, though still militant in another, if there was a union of real Christians joining in one firm band to assail

the strong holds of vice and immorality, instead of laying open each other's errors and mistakes, and thus exposing the great cause itself to the derision of the unbeliever.

He who is zealously running after a favourite opinion, is in danger, in order to establish his point, of losing his moderation by the way, and over-stepping truth at the end : and, what is worse, of converting the sober defence of his own system into a hostile attack of that of another ; for a hot disputant seldom wages defensive war. The point under discussion so heats his temper, as to make him lose sight of its relative importance. Every consideration gives way in support of that opinion which has now the predominance in his mind. And this opinion is not seldom contended for with an eagerness proportioned to its real want of solidity : since great and important objects are seen by their own light, and require not the false fire of pride or passion to blazon their worth. Often does the hot controvertist assert that to be of the very essence
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of religion, which is but a mere adjunct; and often he seems to wonder how men can bestow so much time and thought on any other topic, while his grand concern is under discussion.

It is because these rooted and unexamined prejudices involve human affairs in so much perplexity, that the rectification of our judgment is one of the most important objects of our concern. The opinion which others entertain of us, though it may hurt our fortune or our fame, yet it cannot injure our more essential interests. Their judgment of us can neither wound our conscience nor shake our integrity. The false judgment we form of *them* may do both, especially if we act upon the opinion we have formed; if we speak injuriously of those of whom we think unkindly; if, by following a blind prejudice or precipitate judgment, we decide upon their characters, without possessing those grounds for determining which we insist are indispensable in the opinion they form of us. Jealousy, resentment, envy, often darken our

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perceptions, and are secretly operating on our minds, while we persuade others, and too probably ourselves, that we are promoting the interests of truth and justice, in exposing the faults, or counteracting the schemes of another.

Controversies will be for ever carried on, though converts are not made ; for I do not remember, that of the ancient sects of philosophers, any went over to their opponents. Among the professors of the old school divinity, it does not appear that the disciples ever changed their master — that the advocates of the *angelical* Doctor ever adopted the cause of the *irrefragable* * ; and it appears that the followers of Jansenius and Loyala died with the same mutual hostility in which they had lived.

As truth, however, will be assaulted, it must be defended. Controversial discussions, therefore, are not only harmless, but useful, provided truth be the inspiring motive, and

* Scotus, Aquinas, and the other school divines, were distinguished by these and similar epithets.

charity the medium of conducting them. Truth is frequently beaten out by conflicting blows, when it might have contracted rust and impurity by lying quiet, uninquired into and unassailed. We are in danger of growing negligent about a truth which is never attacked, or of surrounding it with our own fancies, and appending to it our own excrescencies; while the assailant teaches even the friendly examiner to clear the principle of all foreign mixtures, and, by giving it more purity, to give it wider circulation.

But, as we before observed, a thorough partisan in religion, as well as in politics, seldom takes up a book of controversy with an unbiassed mind. He has a pre-determination which seldom gives way to argument. He does not see, that the supporter of his own cause may be maintaining it in a wrong temper; that, while he is fighting for orthodoxy, he may be aiming his side-blows at a personal antagonist, or giving the death's wound to charity. He does not perceive,

that he may be injuring the interests of practical religion, while he is labouring to promote such as are doctrinal, that he may be inflaming the temper while he is informing the understanding. For a controversy is sometimes so managed, that, though truth may be vindicated, the minds of plain Christians may be little informed. Such readers do not understand the logician's terms, which, though they may have the effect of silencing the opponent, do but little towards enlightening the mind or strengthening the faith. Controversies, therefore, in religion or politics often do little good, in comparison of the labour they cost, and the evil tempers they excite. They are seldom read by those to whom, if temperately conducted, they might be of the most service — the unprejudiced. The perusal is commonly confined to two classes, friends and enemies. Now the friends and enemies of a writer form but a small proportion of the world of readers. Of these, the one flies to the book to get his prepossession strengthened,

the other, to get his antipathies confirmed. The partizan was pre-determined that no arguments should shake him, the adversary sat down with the same liberal resolution. Nay, the probability is, that he will declare his former opinion is more immoveably settled by the very reasons the opposer has suggested, so that he feels he is furnished with fresh arms by the antagonist himself.

But though neutrality is not a state of mind to be desired, moderation is. Even these polemical Christians, if each would look calmly and kindly on the other, might discover in his opponent a striking likeness of his own features, if not an entire similarity of complexion; a likeness sufficient to prove that they are both of the same family, all children of one common Father, though they do not carry the exact resemblance in some minutenesses in which parity is not necessary to prove affinity. The general family-likeness should, however, operate as an inducement to treat each other with
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brotherly kindness, even if they were not assured, which they all profess to be, that the common Father will be the common Judge.

CHAP. XI.

Particular Prejudices.

IT is no inconsiderable part of our duty in our necessary connections with that motley mass of characters of which mankind is composed, to conquer certain prejudices which are too apt to arise, especially in persons of fastidious temper and delicate taste, against those, who, though essentially valuable in their general character, have something about them which is positively disagreeable; or who do not fall in with some of our ideas, or whose manners are not congenial to our feelings. To wait before we love our fellow-creatures, till their character be perfect, is to wait till we meet in heaven; and not to serve them till the feeling be reciprocal, is to act on the religion of the publican, and not of the Christian. We should love people for what we see in them of the
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image of their Maker, though it be marred and disfigured. That piety which makes them amiable in His sight, should prevent their being disgusting in ours. If we consulted our principles more, and our taste less, it would cure us of this sharp inquest into their infirmities.

Yet, on the other hand, if religious but coarsely-mannered persons, however safe they may be as to their own state, could be aware how much injury their want of delicacy and prudence is doing to the minds of the polished and discriminating — persons, who, though they may admire Christianity in the abstract, do not love it so cordially as to bear with the grossness of some of its professors; nor understand it so intimately, as to distinguish what is genuine from what is extrinsic — If they could conceive what mischief they do to religion, by the associations which they teach the refined to combine with it, so as to lead them inseparably to connect piety with vulgarity, they would endeavour to correct their own taste, from
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the virtuous fear of shocking that of others. They should remember, that many a thing is the cause of evil which yet is no excuse for it; that many a truth is brought into discredit by the disagreeableness which may be appended to it, and which, though utterly foreign, is made to belong to it.

In addition to the infirmities which, from the fault of nature, or the errors of education, we cannot perhaps so easily avoid, there are others which are purely voluntary. Certain religionists there are who torment themselves with a chimera till they become the victims of the prejudice of their own creation. There is a querulous strain of pious vanity, in which, with a most unamiable egotism, they delight to indulge. It is a sort of traditionary lamentation of evils which, having once been the lot of Christianity in the most awful extreme, are assumed to be still, in no inconsiderable degree, attached to its followers. Surrounded with all the conveniences of life, and faring comfortably, if not sumptuously, every day, they
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yet complain of persecution, as if Christianity still subjected its followers to the sufferings of those primitive disciples, “of whom the world was not worthy.” But let them compare the dreadful catalogue of torments enumerated by the Apostle to the Hebrews—enumerated the more feelingly, as he had experienced in all their extremity the sufferings he describes;—let them compare these with their own petty trials, of which, the worst they have ever felt or feared, is that “of mockings:” “*cruel mockings,*” perhaps, as to the temper of the reviler, but innoxious to the imaginary sufferer. The glorious profession of the saints of old brought on them bonds and imprisonments by order of the government. Ours is sanctioned by the ruling powers. “*They* were destitute, afflicted, tormented;” our distresses are seldom caused by our piety, but frequently by our want of it. *They* were denied the exercise of their religion, we are protected in ours. *They* were obliged to meet clandestinely at undue hours
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in incommodious places. With us, provision is made for public worship, and attendance on it encouraged and commanded.

Let none of us, then, proudly or peevishly complain, as if our abundant piety was either forbidden, discouraged, or underrated. Private prejudice, and individual hatred, are indeed sufficiently alive, but the blows they aim fall hurtless as the feebly-lifted lance of Priam. If, then, we allow ourselves to murmur at our own disadvantages, will it not look as if we inwardly lamented that we are so very good to so little purpose; as if we repined at not being rewarded by universal applause for the superabundance of our piety? May we not, by our complaints, lead the world to suspect that our goodness was practised as a bait for that applause, and that, having missed it, we feel as if we had laboured in vain?

But, from the prejudices which one class of Christians are too ready to indulge against another, we turn to those of a different character; to the philosophical man of the world,

world, who is pre-possessed not so much against any particular class of Christians, as against Christianity itself. These unhappy prejudices are often laid in by an education in which no one thing has been neglected except religion. The intellect has been enlarged by the grandeur, and polished by the splendour, of Pagan literature, which took early possession of the yet vacant mind, and still maintains its ascendancy with that power and energy which naturally belong to first and, therefore, deep impressions. The subsequent character continues to feel the effect of the excessive admiration early excited by some favourite authors, by whom the more impetuous passions and generous vices are exalted into virtues, while the spurious virtues are elevated into perfections little short of divine, and the whole adorned with whatever can captivate the fancy and enchant the taste; with beautiful imagery, ingenious fiction, and noble poetry. Who, indeed, does not feel divided between admiration at their writings, and regret that the writers were

were not providentially favoured with divine illumination? Their brightness, like that of ebony, is a fine polish on a dark substance.

Here the indignant man of letters, if any such should condescend to cast an eye on these pages, will exclaim, Are scholars, then, necessarily irreligious? God forbid! far from me be such a vulgar insinuation — far from me such a preposterous charge; not only against a multitude of eminent lay-Christians, but against the whole of that large and venerable body, whose life and labours are dedicated to religion, all of whom are, or ought to be, learned.

But it is nevertheless true, reason on it as we may, that, in the state of excitement above described, every youth of taste and spirit, who has not been early grounded in Christian principles, must necessarily afterwards first open the volume of Inspiration, and find it destitute of all that false but dazzling lustre with which the page of ancient learning is decorated.

And

And what must considerably add to the prejudice which may reasonably be expected to be thus excited, is, that they find the great object of one religion has been to pull down all the trophies of false glory which the other had so successfully reared. The dignity of human nature, of which they have read and felt so much, is laid prostrate in the dust. Man is stripped of his usurped attributes, robbed of his independent grandeur. A new system, of what appear to him mean-spirited and sneaking virtues—charity, simplicity, devotion, forbearance, humility, self-denial, forgiveness of injuries—is set up in direct opposition to those more ostensible qualities which are so much more flattering to the natural human heart.

These obstacles to religious progress are removed, when, in early institution, the defective principles of the one school are not only pointed out and guarded against, but are even, as is frequently the case, converted into salutary lessons, by being placed in just contrast with the other, and are made at
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once to vindicate the scheme, and to exalt the principles of Christianity.

But he into whose character these principles have not been infused, is too likely to set up on the stock of his own underived powers. The cardinal vice of an irreligious reasoner will naturally be that pride which sets him on considering the Gospel as a narrower of human understanding, a debaser of the soaring spirit of intellectual man, a fetter on the expatiating fancy, a clog on the aspiring mind. This opinion, which he rather adopts by hearsay or tradition than by studying the sacred volume, continues to keep him ignorant of its contents. He is satisfied with knowing Christianity only in the state in which it is presented to him in certain passages, torn from their proper position, disjoined with malignant ingenuity, and distorted by perverted comment, from that connection which would have solved every difficulty and annihilated the triumphant cavil. Or if, under this influence, he take a superficial glance at Christianity, he

sees a religion which, though it prohibits no legitimate greatness, yet a religion whose object is not to make man, according to the estimation of this world, great. His secret prejudices, too, may be augmented by the revolting doctrine, that he is not able to do any thing right of himself. He is to do the work, and to give the glory to another. After having followed with rapture the conqueror of Carthage hanging up his victorious laurels in the Capitol, he will feel indignant to be taught, that the Christian conqueror, instead of glorying in his triumphant crown, "casts it before the throne."

He had observed in Pagan lore, abstract truth prepared for the philosopher, pageants, feasts, and ceremonies for the people. This distinction of rank and intellect flattered human pride. In Christianity he finds one rule, and that a plain rule; one faith, and that a humbling faith; one scheme of duties, irrespective of station or talents: while, in the other, the systems of the learned, and the superstitions of the vulgar, were as distinct

tinged as any two religions, and as inefficacious as none.

But, after all, it is not the idolatry exhibited in the Greek and Roman writers that perhaps can overthrow his faith, though their licentiousness may affect his morals. The hardest blow to his principles will be given by the modern champions of unbelief; by writers against whom the young are not on their guard, because, without Christianity, they slide in under the general title of Christians, disseminating contraband wares under false colours. The wound inflicted by the baptized infidel is more profound than that of the polytheist; whose absurdities render his aim comparatively innoxious. The preposterous systems of a false religion are harmless, compared with objections raised, misrepresentations sent forth, and sarcasms insinuated against the true one.

But if the enthusiastic votary of those systems go no farther than to establish philosophy as his standard, and taste as his guide; when he is brought to think, not

that philosophy and taste are to be abandoned, for Christianity requires no such sacrifice, but that they are to be admired sub-ordinately, the misfortune is, that the second half of life is sometimes spent in imperfectly counteracting the principles imbibed in the first half. It is not easy to get rid of the pre-possession in favour of a morality un-tinctured with religion; of "that love of fame which the pure spirit doth raise," but which it is the office of the renewed spirit to lower — of the admiration exhausted on splendid, but vicious characters — of the idolatry cherished for unprincipled heroes — of the partiality felt for all the powerful rivals which genius has raised up to religion — of all the sins that poetry has canonized — all the sophistry that praise has sanctified — all the pernicious elegancies of the gay — all the hollow reasonings of the grave.

In this state of neutrality between religion and unbelief, happy is it for the faltering novice if he be not fatally offended, that

that Christianity admits people who are not elegant-minded, who are not intellectual, to the same present advantages, to the same future hope, with the profound thinker, and logical reasoner. And, even after the most successful struggles in this new science, it will still be found, and the discovery is humiliating, that the religious attainments of the unlearned are often more rapid, because less obstructed, than those of "the wise and the disputer of this world;" for if the endowments of the unlearned are smaller, they are all carried to one point. They have no other pursuit to divide or divert their attention; they have fewer illusions of the imagination to repel; they bring no opposing system to the Christian scheme; they bring no prejudices against a revelation which holds out a promise of reverſionary happiness to those who are destitute of present enjoyments; and Christianity will generally be more easily believed by those whose more immediate interest it is to think it true. They have no interfering projects

to perplex them; no contradictory knowledge to unlearn; their uninfluenced minds are open to impressions, and good impressions are presented to them. They have less pride to subdue, and no pre-possessions to extinguish. They have no compromise to make with Christianity, no images of deities, which the philosopher, like the Emperor Tiberius, wishes to set up in the same temple with Christ; no adverse tenets which they wish to incorporate with his religion; no ambition to make it a better thing than they find it. We have seen how much philosophy early impeded the reception of pure Christianity in some of the wisest and most virtuous pagan converts. Origen and Tertullian did not receive the truth from heaven with the same simplicity as the fishermen of Galilee.

To prove that this is no flight of enthusiastic fancy, let us recollect with what an extraordinary elevation and expansion of soul the Author of our religion bore his divine testimony to this truth: "I thank Thee,

Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." He then, instead of accounting for it by natural means, resolves the mystery into the good pleasure of God — "*Even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*"

Even the vulgarity which, as we have already observed, mixes with, and debases the religion of the man of inferior attainments; the incorrect language in which he expresses his feelings and sentiments; the coarse images and mean associations which eclipse the divine light, do not extinguish it: they rather, in some measure, prove its intrinsic brightness by its shining through so dense a medium. When the man of refinement sees, as he cannot but see, what amelioration Christianity confers on the character of the uneducated; how it improves his habits, raises his language; what a change it effects in his practice, what a degree of illumination it gives to his dark understanding, what consolation it conveys

to his heart ; how it lightens the burdens of his condition, and cheers the sorrows of his life — he will, if he be candid, acknowledge, that there must needs be a powerful efficacy in that religion which can do more for the ignorant and illiterate, than philosophy has ever done for the great and the learned. And is it not an unanswerable evidence of Christianity and the power of grace, when we see men far surpassing all others in every kind of knowledge, themselves so far surpassed in religious knowledge by persons absolutely destitute of all other.

But if these weak and humble disciples afford a convincing evidence of the truth of Christianity ; if these low recipients exhibit a striking exemplification of its excellence, yet we must confess they cannot exhibit an equally sublime idea of Christian perfection, they cannot adduce the same evidences in its vindication, they cannot adorn its doctrines with the same powerful arguments as highly educated Christians. Habituated to inquiry and reflection, these are capable of forming more just views of the character and attributes

butes of God, more enlarged conceptions of his moral government. They have also the advantage of drawing on their secular funds to augment their spiritual riches. They are conversant with authors contemporary with the inspired writers. Acquaintance with ancient manners and oriental usages also gives great advantage to the lettered readers of Scripture, and, by enabling them to throw new light on passages which time had rendered obscure, adds fresh strength, and double confirmation, to a faith which was before "barred up with ribs of iron." *

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* The paltry cavil on the impossibility that the penitent woman could anoint the feet of Jesus as he sat at meat, could only mislead such readers as were unacquainted with the recumbent posture in which the ancients took their meals. The triumphant sneer at the paralytic, who was let down from the housetop through the tiling with his couch, could only shake the faith of those who are ignorant of the manner in which the houses of eastern countries were roofed.—Whether infidel writers took advantage of the sup-

Scripture also affords a larger range of contemplation to those enlightened minds who study human nature at the same time, or who have previously studied it; because it was upon his knowledge of the human character that the Saviour of the world so strikingly accommodated his religion to the wants and the relief of that being for whose salvation it was intended.

The better educated, also, will better discern, because it demands a higher exercise of the rational powers, that passages of a similar sound have not seldom a dissimilar meaning; and that it is not the words, but the ideas, which constitute the resemblance. The want of this discernment has led many well disposed, but ill informed persons, into mistakes.

posed ignorance of their readers, or whether their ridicule of these imputed absurdities of Scripture arose from their own ignorance, we will not determine. Instances might be multiplied without number of this ignorance, or of this dissingenuousness.

Again :

Again : — Many detached texts are meant as a brief statement of a general truth, and intended to lead the reader into such strains of reflection as shall “ exercise unto Godliness,” instead of exhibiting a full delineation and giving the whole face and figure, every side and aspect of the subject. Scripture frequently proposes some important topic in a popular manner, without making out its full deductions, or its series of consequences. Now, for the fuller understanding these heads, and turning them to their due improvement, the advantage lies entirely on the side of the thinking and the reasoning reader. It must be confessed, however, that the humble, though illiterate Christian, is able to attain all the practical benefits of these suggestions. He compares Scripture with Scripture, he substitutes no opinions of his own for those he there meets with, he never attempts to improve upon Christianity, he never wishes to make the Bible a better thing than he finds it. By diligent application, and serious prayer, his understanding

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enlarges

enlarges with his piety. Above all, he does the "will of God;" and, therefore, "knows of the doctrine that it is of God."

It must be confessed also, on the other hand, that the professed scholar, by converting Scripture-learning into theses of discussion, is in some danger of making his knowledge more critical than practical. The same reason which is meant to enlighten, may be employed to explain away this faith; and his learning which adorns, is capable also of being turned to discredit it.

We must, however, admit, that when our supposed man of education becomes essentially pious, his piety will be of a higher strain. It is more pure, more perfect, more exempt from erroneous mixtures, more clear of debasing associations, more entirely free from disgusting cant and offensive phraseology; less likely to run into imprudence, error, and excess; less in danger of the gloominess of superstition on one hand, and the wildness of fanaticism on the other. Having the use of a better judgment in the
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choice, he is not in the same danger of being misled by ignorant instructors; he is not liable to be drawn away by a vanity so difficult to restrain in the uneducated religious man; a vanity so frequently excited when he sees his own superiority, in this great point, to his worse informed neighbours. From this vanity and this want of the restraint of that modesty imposed by superior education, the man of low condition often appears more religious than he is, because, being disposed to be proud of his piety, he is forward to talk of it. While the higher bred frequently appear less pious than they really are, from the good taste and delicacy which commonly accompany a cultivated mind. There is also another reason why they exhibit it less, they are aware that, in their own society, the exhibition would bring them no great credit.

If unlettered Christians labour under some disadvantages, they yet afford an internal evidence of the truth of Christianity, and an evidence of no small value. They shew that it is the same principle which,

when rightly received, pervades alike all hearts; a principle which makes its direct way to understandings impervious to the shafts of wit, and insensible to the deductions of reasoning—to minds sunk in low pursuits, indurated by vulgar habits. It is a proof of its being the same principle, that such seemingly disqualified persons possess as clear views of its nature, at least of its broad and saving truths, as the man of genius and the scholar; destitute as they are of all his advantages, wanting perhaps his natural perspicacity, unused to his habits of enquiry, incapable of those trains of reflection which he brings from his other subjects to the investigation of this. No one, if he examine impartially, can fail to be struck with this grand characteristic of the truth of Christianity—not only, that in all degrees of capacity and education in the same country, but that in different countries, in those where taste and learning are carried to the highest perfection, and in dark and ignorant nations, where not only the sun of science

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has never dawned, but where no glimpse of religion can be caught by a reflex light, as is the case in polished and Christian countries, — wherever Christianity has made its way, and pierced through the native obscurity, there the genuine spirit, and the great essential fruits of the Gospel, will be found just the same; the same impression is made by the same principle; the same results spring from the same cause, and the disciples of Christ, whether it be the converted Greenlander or the Academical believer, are recognized in all their distinguishing features, are identified in all the leading points. Such a concurrence in sentiment, feeling and practice, such a union in faith hope and charity, amongst persons dissimilar in all other respects, unlike in all other qualities, unequal in all other requisites; minds never made to be akin by nature thus allied by grace, bearing the same stamp of resemblance in spirit as their possessors bear in the common properties of body: — all this is a convincing proof that there must be

Something divine in a principle which can assimilate such contrarieties — which can reunite those in one common centre who differ in all other respects — which can annihilate all distinctions to produce identity in the leading point. Does not all this prove it indeed to be the work of God, a work which requires not previous accomplishments or preparatory research, but only a willing mind, an unprejudiced spirit, and an humble heart? Does it not prove, that where the essence, and the power, and the spirit of Christianity really reside, it will produce the one grand effect, *a new heart and a new life?*

CHAP. XII.

Farther Causes of Prejudice.

IT is a singular fact that the infidel and the fanatic sometimes meet at the same point of error — that reason has little to do with religion. The enthusiast we are hopeless of convincing by argument, because he is commonly ignorant; but the lettered sceptic may be better taught even by his pagan masters. Plutarch, after a large discussion whether brutes had any reason, determines in the negative from this consideration, *because they had no knowledge or feeling of a Deity*. The great Roman orator expresses the same idea when he asserts, *that a capacity for religion was the distinguishing mark of rationality, and affirms that this capacity is the most unequivocal sign of reason*.

Yet sound reason and Christian piety are sometimes represented as if they were bel-
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ligerent powers, and as if *Orders in Council* had been issued to cut off all commerce between them; as if they were better calculated eternally to meet sword in hand, than in the conciliatory way of treaty and negotiation; as if every victory of the one, must necessarily be obtained at the expence of the other's defeat. But is it not an affront to the Giver of every good gift to represent his highest natural and his supernatural endowments as infallibly hostile to each other? It is evident that when reason and religion act in concert, they strengthen each other's hands. But when they injudiciously act in opposition, perverted reason starves the ardour of piety, or ill-judging piety hands over reason to obliquy and scorn. In every case, the ill-understood jealousy of each injures the interests of both.

But the truth is, sound and sober Christianity is so far from discountenancing the use of reason, that she invites its co-operation, knowing that it possesses powerful arms to defend her cause; to defend her against the
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the encroachments of error, the absurdities of fanaticism, the inroads of superstition, the assaults of infidelity. But while she treats it not as a rival but an ally, Christianity, strong in Almighty strength, maintains her own imperial power unimpaired. While she courts the friendship of her confederate, she allows not her own uncontrolled superiority to be usurped. She assigns to reason its specific office, and makes it know and keep its proper limits. The old law, indeed, being a formula of ceremonies, and a digest of ordinances for one particular people, left not so full an exercise for the use of reason. Descending to the most minute particulars, and being expanded into the most detailed directions, it left little for the disciple but to read the rule and follow it. But the New Testament being, as we have elsewhere observed, rather a system of principles, than a mere didactic table of small as well as great duties, leaves much more to the exercise of reason, and furnishes a much larger field for the under-

understanding to develop, to compare, to separate, to combine. The whole plan of duty is, indeed, most clearly and distinctly laid open; but every uniting particle, every intermediate step, every concatenating link, is not traced out with amplitude and fullness.

The more instructed Christian will perceive that some expressions are merely figurative; some are directions for persons under one circumstance, and some for those under another. The Gospel requires, indeed, as implicit submission from the Christian, as the law required from the Jew; but while it proposes truths, all of which equally demand his obedience, some of them require more especially the use of his reflection, and the exercise of his sagacity. We allude not to the great "mysteries of godliness," but but to duties which are of individual application.

If we were to pursue prejudice through all its infinite variety, we should never have done with the inexhaustible subject. Ob-
servation

servation presents to us followers of truth of a very different cast, though their uniform object be the same. These persons, while they sometimes seek her Temple by different paths, are yet oftener kept wide of each other by words than by things. Whatever, indeed, be the separating principle, prejudice is always carried to its *greatest* height by the impatience of the too fiery on the one hand, and the contempt of the too frigid on the other. But both, as we observed, maintain their distance more by certain leading terms by which each is fond to be discriminated, and by an intolerance in each, to the terms adopted by the other; than by any radical distinction which might fairly keep them asunder. Now we do not wish them to relinquish the use of their peculiar terms, because they either do, or should designate to their minds the most important characters of religion. The Christian should neither shrink from his own strong hold, nor treat with repulsive disdain him who appears earnest in his approaches
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towards it, though he has not as yet, through some prejudice of education, fought it in a direct way. There are many terms, such as *faith* and *grace*, and others which might be mentioned, which subject the more advanced Christian to the imputation of enthusiasm and the charge of cant. These, however, are words which are the signs of things on which his eternal hopes depend, and he uses them, even though he may sometimes do it unseasonably, yet not as the Shibboleth of a profession, but because there are no others exactly equivalent to their respective meanings. In fact, if he did not use them when occasion calls, he would be deserting his colours, and be making a compromise, to the ruin of his conscience.

But let him not in return fall too heavily on what are, to his ear, the obnoxious terms of his adversary. Let him not be so forward to consider the terms *virtue* and *rectitude* as implying heresies that must be hewed down without mercy; as substantives which must never find a place in the Christian's

tian's Lexicon. They are not only very innocent but very excellent words, if he who utters them only means to express by Virtue those good works which are the fruits of a right faith, and by Rectitude that unbending principle of equity and justice which designates the confirmed Christian. The abuse of these terms may, indeed, make the adversary a little afraid of using them, as the unnecessary multiplication of ordinary cases in which the more scriptural terms are pressed into the service, may make the less advanced Christian unreasonably shy of obtruding them.

But why must we vilify in others what we are cautious of using ourselves in order to magnify what we chuse to adopt? We should rather be glad that those who somewhat differ from us, come so near as they do; that they are more religious than we expected; that if they are in error, they are not in hostility; or if seemingly averse, it is more to the too indiscriminate and light use of the opponent's terms, than to the sober

sober reception of the truths they convey. Let us be glad even at the worst, to see opposition mitigated, differences brought into a narrower compass. Let us not encounter as leaders of hostile armies, but try what can be done by negotiation, though never of course, by concession in essentials. If the terms Virtue and Rectitude are used to the exclusion of faith and grace, or as substitutes for them, it may afford an opening for the pious advocate to shew the difference between the principle and its consequence, the root and its produce. He should charitably remember that it is one thing for an honest enquirer to come short of truth, and another for a petulant caviller to wander wide of it. It is one thing to err through mistake or timidity, and another to offend through wilfulness and presumption. If the enquirer be of the former class, only deficient and not malignant, he may be brought to feel his deficiency, and is often in a very improveable state. It would therefore be well to let him see that you think him right as far as he

he goes, but that he does not go to the bottom. If he professes "to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts," this is no small step. He may still require to be convinced that it is "by the grace of God teaching him." Here the two ideas expressed by your term of Grace, and his of Virtue, are brought into united action, with this difference, or if you please with this agreement, that your's being the cause, and his the effect, the Christian character attains its consummation between you. You must, however, endeavour to convince him, that though the greater includes the less, the reverse cannot be true; that faith and grace in the Christian sense involve virtue and rectitude, but virtue and rectitude in the philosophical sense desire to be excused from any connection with faith and grace. But the offence taken at terms creates hostility at the outset, blocks up the avenues to each other's heart, and leads men to be so filled with the things in which they differ, as to

keep them in the dark as to the things in which they agree.

The more strict disputant will perhaps continue to insist that no such terms as virtue and rectitude are to be found in any Evangelist. Granted. — Neither do we find there some other solemn words expressive of the most awful verities of our religion. The holy *Trinity* and the *satisfaction* made by the death of Christ, are not, I believe, in any part of the New Testament expressed by these terms, which were first used some ages after in the Byzantine church. But can it be said that the things themselves are not to be found there? They are not only conspicuous in every part of the Gospel, but make up the sum and substance of what it teaches.

While each disputant then contends for his own phrases, let not the one suspect that Grace and Faith are the watch-words of enthusiasm; nor the other conclude that infidelity skulks behind virtue, and pagan pride behind rectitude. St. Paul expressly exhorts

exhorts his converts to “add to their faith virtue,” and if the inverted injunction was never given, it was not because faith was unnecessary where virtue previously existed, but because virtue, Christian virtue, never could have existed at all without previous faith. In enjoining virtue, the Apostle, upon his own uniform principle, supposes the Christian to be already in possession of faith; this he ever considers the essential substance, virtue the inseparable appendage. Thus the divine preacher on the Mount, in his prohibition of an hypocritical outside, does not say, Give alms, fast, pray; he concluded that his followers were already in the practice of those duties, and on this conviction grounded his cautionary exhortation; *when* thou doest alms, *when* thou prayest, *when* thou fastest. He taught them to avoid all ostentation in duties, to which he alluded as already established. Be it observed — by the Saviour himself no attribute is so constantly enjoined or commanded as faith. His previous question to those who resorted to him

to be cured, was not if they had *virtue*, but *faith*; but never let it be forgotten, that as soon as the cure was performed, the man of faith was enjoined, as the surest evidence of his virtue, *to sin no more*.

CHAP. XIII.

Humility, the only true Greatness.

HUMILITY is one of those qualities of which Christianity requires the perpetual practical exercise. It does not insist that we should be constantly feeding or instructing others — that we should be every moment engaged in acts of benevolence to our fellow-creatures, or of mortification to ourselves; but, whether we teach or are taught, whether we communicate our good things to others, or are dependant on others for the communication to ourselves, humility is required as the invariable, the indispensable, the habitual grace, in the life of a Christian. Pride being the radical distemper of the natural man; the business, the duty, the blessedness of the spiritual man, is to be freed from it.

However valuable high intellectual attainments have been found in the vindication of religion, however beneficially talents and learning have been exerted in adducing the evidences and augmenting the illustrations of divine truth, yet for the most striking exemplification of genuine piety, "To this man will I look, saith the Lord, who is of an humble spirit." Christianity gives a new form to the virtues, by re-casting them in this mould. Humility may be said to operate on the human character like the sculptor, who, in chiselling out the statue, accomplishes his object, not by laying on, but by paring off, not by making extraneous additions, but by retrenching superfluities; till every part of the redundant material is cleared away. The reduction which true religion effects, of swelling passions, irregular thoughts, and encumbering desires, produces at length on the human mind some assimilation to the divine image—that model by which it works—as the human resemblance

semblance is gradually, and at length successfully, wrought in the marble.

Christianity, though equally favourable to the loftiest as to the lowest condition of life, was not intended to make man great, but to make him contented to be little. Though no enemy to the possession and cultivation of the highest mental powers, but affording, on the contrary, the noblest objects for their investigation, and the richest materials for their exercise; yet she rests not her truth on their discussions, nor depends for making her way to the heart on their reasonings. While the cheering approbation of an humble faith is an encouragement repeatedly held out in the Gospel, there is not one commendation of talent, except for its application — not the least notice of rank or riches, except to intimate their danger — not any mention of the wisdom of this world, except to pronounce its condemnation.

Humility stands at the head of the beatitudes, and is incorporated with them all.

And the gracious injunction, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," is a plain intimation, that our Redeemer particularly intended that portion of his own divine character for the most immediate object, not of our admiration only, but of our imitation. It is the temper which of all others he most frequently commends, most uniformly enjoins, and which his own pure and holy life most invariably exhibits. If we look into the Old Testament, we see that God, after having described himself as "the high and holy One which inhabiteth eternity," by a transposition the most unexpected, and a condescension the most inconceivable, immediately subjoins, that "He dwelleth with the contrite and the humble;" and this from a motive inexpressibly gracious, "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Is it not incredible that, after these repeated declarations and examples of the Almighty Father and of the Eternal Son, that pride should still be thought a mark of greatness

greatness, an ebullition of spirit; and that humility should be so little understood to be the true moral dignity of Christians? While in the religion which they profess, there is no excellence to which it is not preliminary, and of which it is not the crown; nor are other virtues genuine but as they are accompanied with this grace, and performed in this spirit. No quality has acquired its perfection, till it is clarified and refined by being steeped in humility.

It is indeed essential to the very reception of Christianity, for, without this principle, we shall be disposed to cavil at divine revelation, to reject, at least, every truth revolting to human pride; we shall require other ground for the belief in God than his revealed word, other evidence of his veracity than the internal conviction of our spiritual wants, and the suitableness of that remedy which the Gospel presents to us. This principle, therefore, is indispensable; without it, we shall be little inclined cordially to receive Christianity as a light, or to obey it

as a rule. Without it, we shall not discover the evil of our own hearts ; and, without this discovery, we shall by no means value the grace of the Holy Spirit ; we shall exercise no habitual dependance on the promised assistance, nor seek for a support of which we do not feel the want.

But humility, by leading us to form a just estimate of ourselves, teaches us to discern the narrowness of our capacities. It reminds us, that there are many things even in the works of God's natural creation far above our comprehension ; that from the ignorance and blindness of our minds we make frequent mistakes, and form a very erroneous judgment about things comparatively obvious and intelligible. This temper will bring us to credit with fuller cordiality the testimony which God in his word gives of himself, and cure us of the vanity of rejecting it, on the mere ground that we cannot comprehend it. It will deliver us from the desire of being "wise above what is written," and is the sole antidote to the perils of that
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promise of unhallowed knowledge, with which the grand seducer tempted his first credulous victims.

It is not till humility has practically made known to us how slowly religion produces its effect on ourselves, that we cease to marvel at its feeble influence and slow-paced efficacy on those around us. As a consequence, this principle leads the humble Christian to be severe in judging himself, and disposes him to be candid in judging others. When he compares himself with worse men, it furnishes a motive, not for vanity, but gratitude; when with better, for additional self-abasement.

St. Paul seems to have been fully aware of the lagging movement which even Christians make towards the compleat attainment of this heavenly temper. In his address to the Colossians, after having expressed his firm hope of their sincere conversion, in that they had "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him," he yet finds it ex-

pedient to exhort them ; and, for this very reason, “ to put on,” together with other Christian qualities which he enumerates, “ humbleness of mind.”

He might have pressed this duty under the supposition of two cases, and, in either, the injunction would be just. As they had made a public profession of Christianity, he intimates, that there was no surer way of evincing that their profession was sincere, and their conversion radical, than by this unequivocal mark, the cultivation of an humble spirit. Or, on the other hand, however deeply rooted they might be in faith and piety, he might feel it necessary to remind them, that they should not consider themselves as having attained a perfection which left no room for improvement. So far was this deep proficient in divine wisdom from thinking that all was done when the convert had entered on his new course, he enjoins them, even after this effectual change, that they should, as a consequence as well as a proof, *therefore* “ put on ” this Christian grace ;
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and produces their conversion as a motive, "*because* you are already renewed." He does not recommend any specific act, so much as a general disposition of "*mind*," implying, according to his uniform practice, that growth was necessary to life, and progress to perfection.

The doctrines of Christianity, and the discourses of its divine Author, are rather pointed against certain radical evil principles, than extended to their lesser ramifications. When the powerful artillery of the Gospel was more especially levelled against the strong holds of pride, it included in the attack all the minor offences resulting from it; implying, that if the citadel be conquered, the intimidated forces in the outworks will make but a feeble resistance.

Even the worldly and the careless, who are perhaps too inattentive to perceive that humility is the predominating feature in the truly religious character, as well as the most amiable and engaging part of it, yet pay it a sort of involuntary homage in adopting
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its outward appearance. Many among the more elegant classes of society, who cannot be brought to adopt the principle, assume the form, as the most unequivocal mark of their superior condition. But while the well-bred exhibit the polished exterior of humility in *manner*, they are called, as Christians, to cultivate the inward and spiritual grace. In spite of the laws against egotism which the code of good breeding has issued, a nearer intimacy sometimes discloses the self-satisfaction which politeness had thinly veiled. While we are prone to carry our virtues in our memory, we cannot be always on our guard against producing them in our conversation. If they are not the fruit of self-inquiry and habitual discipline, they will be superficial, and things on the surface, we know, are soon discovered. Such virtues, for the most part popular ones, caught our taste perhaps from the applause with which they were received, or the eloquence with which they were set forth in our presence: and as we acquired them

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in public, and by hearing and reading, we shall be contented to exercise them in profession and talk. Many, and very many of these qualities, may be grafted on the old stock, and look green and flourishing, whilst they "have no root in themselves;" but genuine humility springs out of a root deeply fixed in the soil of a renewed heart, and takes its first ground on the full conviction of our apostacy from God.

As we make a proficiency in this humbling knowledge of ourselves, our confidence in our own virtues proportionally diminishes. The delight we once received in the contemplation is first abated by self-distrust, and finally abolished by self-acquaintance. Then we begin to profit by the deep sense of our own weakness, and to lend forth the genuine fruits of a strength and a virtue derived from higher sources. And thus, the sound conviction of our own frailty, though purchased at the expence of a great error, may prove, if we might venture to say it, of more real benefit to our
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own mind, than the performance of a splendid action, if of that action all the use we had made had been to repose added confidence in our own strength, or to entertain higher notions of our own goodness.

Yet, while we ought to be deeply humbled at every fresh detection of evil in our hearts, to be discouraged at the discovery from proceeding in our Christian course is so far from being an effect of humility, that it is rather the result of pride. The traveller who meets with a fall, does not recover his ground by lying still and lamenting, but by rising and pursuing his journey. Joined with this faulty despondency, or still more frequently preceding it, is to be traced the operation of a blind and morbid pride. Particularly, if the intimation of the fault we have committed comes from others, the heart is found to rise at the bare suggestion that we are not perfect. We had perhaps been guilty of a hundred faults before, of which, as others took no notice, they made little impression on ourselves. We commit a smaller

a smaller error, which draws the eyes of the world upon us, and we are not only dejected but almost hopeless. The eye of God was equally witness to our preceding faults, yet from their being secret, they produced little compunction, while that which is obvious to human inspection produces sorrow on the mere ground of producing shame. Perhaps we were permitted to fall into this more notorious error that we might be brought to advert to those of which we had been so little sensible; and though the depression consequent upon this fault is rather the consciousness of mortified pride, than of pious contrition, yet God may make use of it to awaken us to a feeling of our general corruptions, to warn us not to depend on ourselves, and to put us on our guard against "secret faults," as well as against open and "presumptuous sins."

Even a good man is not entirely exempt from the danger of occasional elation of spirit; even a good man does not always judge himself so rigorously as he ought; yet,

yet, though he makes too many partial allowances, is too much disposed to softening and abatements, to apologies and deductions, still he is, on the whole, suspicious of himself, distrustful of his own rectitude, on his guard against habitual aberrations from humility. Though tremblingly alive to kindness, his sincerity makes him almost ready to regret commendation, because his enlightened conscience tells him, that if the panegyrist knew him as he knows himself, it would have been bestowed with much abatement; and he is little elated with the praise which is produced by ignorance and mistake. Though he has fewer faults than some others, yet, as he must know more of himself than he can know of them, his humility will teach him to bear patiently even the censure he does not deserve, conscious how much he does deserve for faults which the censurer cannot know.

There is, however, no humility in an excessive depreciation of ourselves. We are not commanded to take a false estimate of

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our own character, though a low would be too frequently a just one. While the great Apostle St. Peter was contented to call himself *the servant of Jesus Christ*, his self-constituted successors, by an hyperbole of self-abasement, have denominated themselves *servants of the servants of God*. And yet they have not, it is to be feared, *always* surpassed the disciple they profess to follow, in the display of this apostolic grace.

Nor is the appearance of this quality any infallible proof of its existence. Nothing is more common than to hear affability to the poor produced as an undoubted evidence of the humility of the affluent. The act, indeed, is always amiable, whatever be the motive; but still the expression is equivocal. Does it not sometimes too much resemble that septennial exhibition of humility which calls forth so much smiling condescension from the powerful, while it conveys “an hour’s importance to the poor man’s heart?” The one enjoys the brief, but keen delight, of reviling his superiors
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with impunity, with the better gratification of conferring favours instead of receiving them; the other, like Dryden's Achitophel, "bowing popularly low," wins, by his courtesy, that favour, which he would not perhaps have obtained by his merit. But the curtain soon closes on the personated scene: — the next day, both fall back into their natural character and condition. The periodical condescension at once reinstates itself into its seven years' dignity, while the *independent elector* cheerfully resumes his place in his *dependent* class, till the next Saturnalia again invite to the reciprocal exchange of character.

Where the difference of condition is obviously great, nothing is lost, and something may be gained by familiarity; the condescension is so apparent, that though it properly excites both admiration and gratitude in the indigent, it does not infallibly prove the lowliness of the superior. The impassable gulf which separates the two conditions, the immoveable fences which establish that distance, preserve the
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poor from encroachment, and the rich from derogation: no swellings of heart arise against the acknowledged dependant, no dread of emulation against the avowed inferior. Even arrogance itself is gratified at seeing its train augmented by so amiable a thing as its own kindness. Notice is richly repaid by praise, and condescension finds it has only stooped to rise. The discreetly proud are aware, that arrogant manners bar up men's hearts against them; their very pride, therefore, preserves them from insolence, the determined object being to gain hearts, and their good sense telling them that a haughty demeanour is not the way to gain them, they know how to make the exterior affable in proportion as the mind is high; for the ingenuity of pride has taught it, that popularity is only to be obtained by concealing the most offensive part of itself. Thus it can retain its nature and gratify its spirit, without the arrogant display by which vulgar pride disgusts, and, by disgusting, loses its aim.

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The true test is, how the same person feels, and how he conducts himself towards him whose claims come in competition with his own — who treads on his heels in his pretensions, or surpasses him in his success — who is held up as his rival in genius, in reputation, in fortune, in display — who runs the race with him and outstrips him. More severe will be the test, when the competitor is “his own familiar friend,” who was his equal, perhaps, his inferior, in the contest for academical honours, but is now a more fortunate candidate for the prizes which the world distributes, or his decided conqueror on the professional Arena.

His humility is put to the trial, when he hears another extolled for the very quality on which he most values himself — commended for something in which he would, if he dared, monopolize commendation — it is tried when he sees that a man of merit has prospered in an enterprize in which *he* has failed, or when he is called upon for the magnanimity to acknowledge one who is
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below him in general character, still his superior in this particular respect — it is, when, in some individual instance, this competitor has promoted the public good by a means which *he* had declared to be totally inapplicable to the end.

The true Christian will be humble in proportion to the splendour of his endowments. Humility does not require him to stupify or disavow his understanding, and thus disqualify or indispose him for great active duties. If he possesses talents he is not unconscious of them, but, instead of exulting in the possession, he is abased that he has not turned them to better account, he is habitually thinking how he can most essentially serve God with his own gift. Sensible that he owes every thing to his divine Benefactor, he feels that he has not made him the return to which he was bound, and that his gratitude bears little proportion to his mercies; so that the very review of his abilities and possessions, which inflates the hearts of others, only deepens his humility, only fills

fills his mind with a fuller sense of his own defect of love and thankfulness. Every distinction, instead of intoxicating him, only augments his sense of dependence, magnifies his weight of obligation, encreases his feeling of accountableness. His humility has a double excitement:—he receives every blessing as the gift of God through the merits of his Son; it is encreased by the reflection, that such is his unworthiness, he dares not even supplicate the mercy of his Creator but through the intercession of a Mediator: “Where is boasting then? it is excluded.” Not only on account of any good he may have, but also on account of evils from which he has been preserved, he acknowledges himself indebted to divine assistance; so that his escapes and deliverances, as well as his virtues, are subjects of gratitude rather than of self-exaltation.

It will not be departing from the present object, if we contrast the quality under consideration with its opposite. While humility is never at variance with itself, pride is
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a very inconsistent principle. It knows not only how to assume the garb of the attribute to which it is opposed, but even descends to be abject, which humility never is. Consider it on one side, nothing is so self-supported; survey it on the other, you will perceive that nothing is so dependent, so full of claims, so exacting, so incapable of subsisting on itself. It is made up of extrinsic appendages; it leads a life of mendicity; it stoops to beg the alms of other men's good opinion for its daily bread. It is true, the happiness of a proud man, if he have rank, arises from an idea of his own importance; but still, to feed and maintain this greedy self-importance, he must look around him. His pleasures are derived, not so much from his personal enjoyments, as from his superiority to others; not so much from what he possesses, as from the respect his possessions inspire. As he cannot entirely support his feelings of greatness by what he finds in himself, he supplies the deficiency by looking backward to his ancestors, and

downward upon his train. With all his self-consequence, he is reduced to borrow his dignity from the merits of the one, and the numbers of the other. By thus multiplying himself, he feels not only individually, but numerically, great. These foreign aids and adjuncts help him to enlarge the space he fills in his own imagination, and he is meanly contented to be admired for what is, in effect, no part of himself. This sentiment is, however, by no means limited to rank or riches.

If the penury of pride drives it to seek its aliment in the praise of others, it is chiefly because we want their good opinion to confirm us in that which we have of ourselves. When we secretly indulge in reckoning up the testimonies we have collected to our worth, it is because we like to bring as many witnesses as we can muster, that we may have their approving verdict in additional proof that our own judgment was right. In fact, we think better of ourselves in proportion as we contrive to make more

people think well of us. But, however large the circle which "high imaginations" draw round the individual self in the centre, it is a short, but not unjust, reflection, with which we dismiss the subject of this fantastical principle, that we can really occupy no more than our allotted space; we may indeed change our position, but, in shifting it, we fill no more than we filled already, for by the removal we lose as much as we gain.

It is an humbling truth, that the most powerful talents are not seldom accompanied with vehement passions, that a brilliant imagination is too frequently associated with ungoverned appetites. Neither natural reason, nor motives merely moral, are commonly found to keep these impetuous usurpers in order; the strength of men's passions tempting them to violate the rules which the strength of their judgment has laid down. What is natural in the intellect, will not, of itself, govern what is natural in the appetite. If the lower part of our nature is subdued,

it is not without the holy spirit assisting the higher. Wit, especially, has such a tendency to lead astray the mind which it embellishes, that it is a striking evidence of the efficacy of grace, when men, whose shining talents make virtue lovely in the eyes of others, reject themselves "high thoughts engendering pride;" when they, on whose lips the attention of others hangs with delight, can, themselves, by this divinely infused principle, "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

There is no quality so ready to suspect, and so prompt to accuse, as that which we are considering; there is no fault which a proud man so readily charges upon others as pride; especially if the person accused possess those distinctions and accomplishments, the possession of which would make the accuser proud. Men full of themselves, are disposed to fancy others deficient in attention to them; and as it never occurs to them why those attentions are withheld, they have no other way of accounting for
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the neglect, but to charge the neglecter with being envious of his qualities, or vain of his own.

The proud man, by not cordially falling in with the Christian scheme — which, if he thoroughly adopted, would shrink to nothing these bloated fancies — contracts, in effect, the duration of his existence, and reduces to almost nothing the sphere in which his boasted dignity is to be exercised. The theatre on which he is satisfied to act, is limited to the narrow stage of this world; and even on this vanishing scene how far are the generality from being considerable actors! Pride, therefore, is something worse than fatuity, for whether the stake be high or low, it is sure to play a losing game. It is difficult to say which lot will be most terrible; his, who, having performed an obscure and painful part in this short drama, and having neglected to seek that kingdom promised to the poor in spirit, closes his life and hopes together; or his, who, having had a conspicuous part assigned him here,

submits, when the curtain drops, not merely to be nothing; but oh! how much worse than nothing! Absorbed in the illusions and decorations of this shifting spectacle, or intoxicated with the plaudits of the spectators, the interminable scenes which lie beyond the grave, though, perhaps, not absolutely disbelieved, have been totally neglected to be taken into his brief reckoning.

Now, if pride were really a generous principle, if its tumour were indeed greatness, surely the soul which entertains it would exert its energies on a grander scale! If ambition were indeed a noble sentiment, would it not be pointed to the noblest objects; would it not be directed to the sublimest end? Would not the mind which is filled with it, achieve a loftier flight? Would it stoop to be cooped up within the scanty precincts of a perishing world? True ambition would raise its votary above the petty projects which every accident may overturn, and every breath destroy; which a few months *may*, and a few years *must*, termi-

terminate. It would set him upon reflecting, that all the elevation of intellect, all the depth of erudition, all the superiority of rank, all the distinction of riches, is only held by the attenuated thread that attaches him to this world—a world which is itself “hung upon nothing.” True ambition would instruct him, that he is not really great who is not great for eternity—that to know the height and depth, the length and breadth, of the knowledge of God, and of his eternal love in Christ Jesus, is the consummation of all knowledge, the top of all greatness, the substance of all riches, the sum of all wisdom; that the only object sufficiently capacious to satisfy the grasping desires, to fill the hungering soul of man, is that immortality which is brought to light by the Gospel; that state which has God for its portion, and eternity for its duration, is alone commensurate to the grandeur of a soul redeemed by the blood of Christ. This holy ambition would shew him, that there is a littleness in whatever has boun-

boundaries — a penury in every thing of which we can count the value — an insignificance in all, of which we perceive the end.

Let it, then, ever be considered as a destitution of true greatness, practically to blot out eternity from its plan. As a consequence, let that be truly designated “the wisdom from above,” which makes eternity the grand feature in the aspect of our existence. And this ambition, be it remembered, is the exclusive property of the humble Christian. *His* desires are illimitable — *he* disdains the scanty bounds of time — *he* leaps the narrow confines of space. He it is who monopolizes ambition. *His* aims soar a bolder flight — *his* aspirations are sustained on a stronger pinion — *his* views extend to an immeasurable distance — *his* hopes rest in an interminable duration.

Yet if his felicity does not, like that of secular ambition, depend on popular breath, still it subsists on dependence. It subsists
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upon a trust which never disappoints — upon a mercy which is never exhausted — upon a promise which never deceives — upon the strength of an arm which “scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts” — on a benignity which “exalteth the meek and humble” — on a liberality, which, in opposition to worldly generosity, “fills the hungry alone with good things,” and which, contrary to human vanity, sends only “the rich empty away.”

Humility is an attribute of such antipathy to the original constitution of our nature, that no principle can possibly produce it in its full extent, and bring it to its complete maturity, but that of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No spirit short of this can enable us to submit our understanding, to subdue our will, to resign our independence, to renounce ourselves.

This principle not only teaches us to bow to the authority and yield to the providence of God, but inculcates the still harder lesson of submitting to be saved in the only way
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He has appointed — a way which lays pride in the dust. If even, in the true servants of God, this submission is sometimes interrupted — if we too naturally recede from it — if we too reluctantly return to it, it is still owing to the remains of pride, the master-sin ; a sin too slowly discarded even from the renewed nature. This impartial conquest of the stubborn will, this imperfect resignation, this impeded obedience, even in the real Christian, is an abiding proof that we want farther humbling, a mortifying evidence, that our hearts are not yet completely brought under the dominion of our principles.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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